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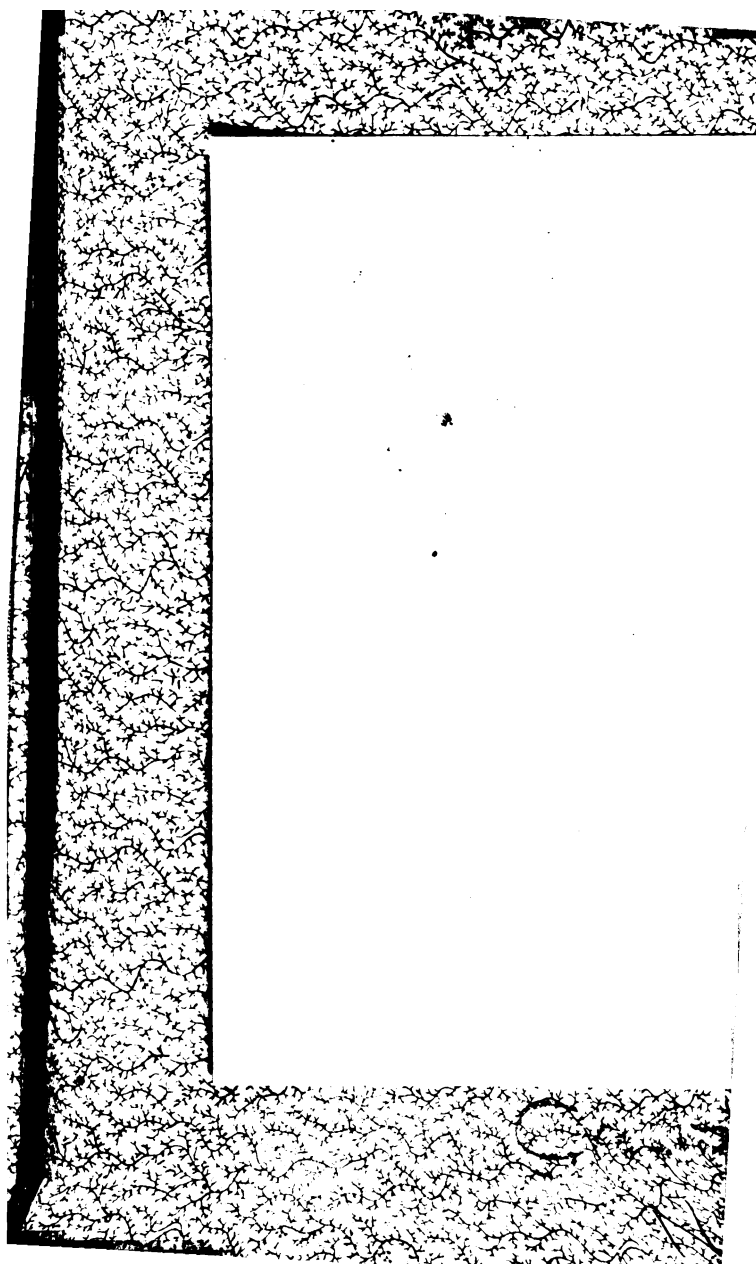
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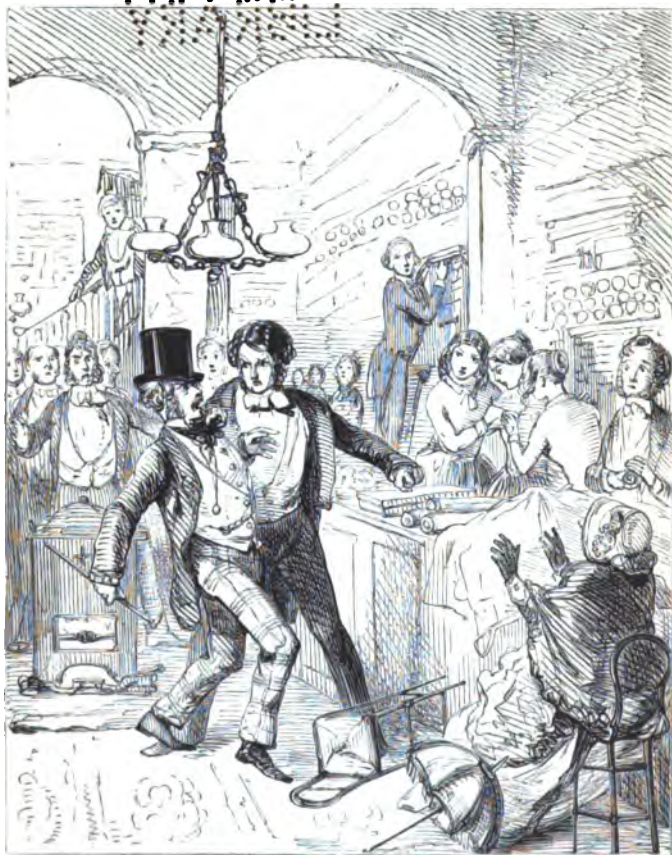
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A Story of London Life.

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WEST END.

BY MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND.

(LATE CAMILLA TOULMIN.)

Author of "Partners for Life," "Lays and Legends of English Life," &c. &c.

"What morals wrought in suffering, wilt thou teach,
What truths from tribulation learned, unfold!"

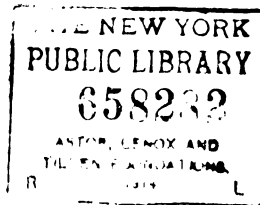
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WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY JOHN LEECH.

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TO

HER TRUE-HEARTED AND GIFTED FRIEND,

MRS. DAVID OGILVY,

WHO, THOUGH

ELEVATED BY POSITION ABOVE TOIL AND ITS TRIALS,

HAS EVER READY

A GENEROUS SYMPATHY WITH THE LABOURS AND SORROWS OF
HUMANITY,

The following Pages

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

1





PREFACE.

THE Story of "Toil and Trial" is an endeavour to awaken sympathy for a class of persons,—numbered in the Metropolis alone by tens of thousands,—who appear to have been singularly neglected by writers of fiction, in this age when Fiction is the favourite vehicle for embodying and illustrating Truth. Yet, I trust, that I have avoided the error, to the brink of which earnest feelings are so likely to lead,—the error of writing in a partisan spirit.

I have striven to put prominently forward the great truth of social life, that the real and permanent interest of Employers and Employed is identical: and though, for the purposes of my Story, I have found it necessary to depict Oppressors, my Readers will acknowledge that

I have been careful to display the reverse of the medal. If I have thrown some little halo of interest about a suffering class, I have also represented individuals of it as unworthy of respect and confidence.

C. C.

BLACKHEATH,
Sept., 1849.



TOIL AND TRIAL.

CHAPTER I.

"For them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark :
Half ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel."—KEATS.

"Some of us are magnificently good,
And hold the head up high like a giraffe."—FESTUS.

WORDS, adjectives especially, have their day for hard service, and it needs not a very long life to survive the fashion of very favourite terms. There are some signs afloat which make us hope "respectable" is growing every day more exact and less comprehensive in its meaning. Hence arises a difficulty in describing Mr. Charles Denison. You would have heard three or four years ago that he was a respectable man had you made inquiry on the mart where traders congregate, or in the neighbourhood either of his town establishment, or of his suburban villa. He paid his way as a respectable man should do. In the commercial world his "paper" was looked on as a bank-note, and tradespeople's weekly bills were punctually discharged. In the conduct of the two establishments, however, there was a marked difference. Mrs. Chippin, the housekeeper in ——— Street, contracted for the large supplies of provisions necessary to fill nearly a hundred mouths,
Toil and Trial.

receiving the sorriest quality, and paying on the part of her employer that lowest market-price which competition always decides, though she managed, nevertheless, to wring a percentage from the supplies for her own privy purse.

But at Portland Lodge the opposite order of things prevailed. Like many another avaricious man, Mr. Denison was fond of ostentatious display, and the applause of those about him. His domestic servants were paid liberally and fed sumptuously, for they contributed to his individual comfort. Mr. Denison liked good living; and liked still better the reputation of giving good dinners, which is not to be obtained save on certain conditions. Consequently, the most choice commodities were usually reserved by the respective tradesmen for the Lodge—the “prime haunch,” the “prize pine,” or the one turbot of the market.

Mrs. Denison, his second wife and fitting help-mate, was a little dark-eyed, fussy, had-been-pretty woman, of five-and-thirty, with a disagreeable voice, and a will of her own. She wore rich silks and expensive jewellery the first thing in the morning, though to be sure her “first thing” was not very early. But to make amends for her own indulgence the servants, inclusive of Miriam Lowe, the young governess, were up betimes, and had a long day for their several duties. To do Mrs. Denison justice, however much she misapplied her own time, she took care no one else should be idle; she was always wanting some one to do something for her, while her temper, variable as the vane on the house-top, prevented any one foreseeing what her wants and wishes would be. The only employment her needle ever attempted was on that ingenious time-wasting, known by the generic title of “fancy-work,” in which she sank to the deepest depths of uselessness, by seldom or never finishing the tasks she began. Half-netted purses, and strips and squares of canvas half covered with the

brilliant coloured Berlin wools, ravelled, soiled, and rumpled, jostled each other in her work drawer, or about her drawing-room table, telling a plain tale to the thoughtful observer of ennui, idleness, and caprice.

The only books Mrs. Denison read were novels; but even from the best of these she failed to extract the wise lessons they so often unprofessedly teach, or to perceive the rock-truths they often enshrine—those truer truths than all the facts of history. These attributes were to her mental vision like beauty to the blind; for, fine lady as she thought herself, she was in an Egyptian darkness of ignorance of all those things it most behoves a human being to know. She and her husband were a well-matched couple, whose Religion was the worship of self; whose Morality was a dread of the world's opinion; and whose Sympathies had no wider range than the circle of their own offspring;—that mere animal affection in which we are exceeded by many of the brutes, yet for the indulgence of which not a few parents take to themselves great credit, and make what they are pleased to term “justice to their children,” the excuse for every species of extortion and injustice towards the rest of their fellow-creatures!

It was a lovely evening in the lovely month of June, when an English garden is in the prime and pride of its odorous wealth; and the breath of the flowers stole gently into the apartment—albeit, nearly overpowered by the legacy of the viands recently despatched—where Mr. and Mrs. Denison sat at dessert after their six o'clock dinner. Miriam Lowe had brought down the children and then retired, as was her custom, leaving Master Charles, a healthy-looking, daring, self-willed boy, of some seven or eight years old, by his mother's side, and the two little girls, both older than their brother, more especially under their father's wing. Some fruit and—

a few kisses—were given to the little ones ; but what Mr. and Mrs. Denison would have called their “devotion” to their children by no means included the clasping tendril sympathy which wins love and confidence without an effort on either side. They were neither good enough nor great enough to read that beautiful page—a child’s mind. No wonder their discourse was little adapted to interest or exalt their hearers.

“Pray, my dear,” said Mr. Denison to his wife, “take care that every thing is very nice to-morrow ; and do tell Randall when to open the champagne, without his requiring a hint from you or me.”

“I wish I had known of this Mr. Warder’s coming a day or two ago,” said the lady ; “we have nothing but a common Sunday’s dinner, and I hardly know what addition to make without sending quite into town.”

“There is no occasion for any addition,” he replied, sipping his wine with much complaisance. “I flatter myself Matthew Warder will be quite content with our common Sunday’s dinner. Indeed, I much prefer his first visit should come about in this unexpected manner, than that his reception should seem premeditated. If I had given him a week’s invitation, he would have put every thing down to the account of preparation and a party, whereas he must have known that I could have had no more idea of meeting him this morning than of making acquaintance with the Man in the Moon. Oh ! it’s much better as it is.”

Matthew Warder better deserves a volume to be written in description of his life and character, than Mr. Denison a single paragraph ; unless, indeed, the beacon of warning be as necessary for our safety and well-doing, as the light which shines to lead us upwards and onwards. Yet the two had been closely associated for some years in their youth. They had been fellow-assistants in one of the largest Drapery Establishments

in London, and though not friends in the noblest signification of the word, yet intimate acquaintances at that period of life when character is commonly so little developed, that habit and circumstance often weave bonds of union between very opposite minds. They were about the same age, and both had married and been established in business early in life.

Mr. Denison's first wife was a widow, encumbered with a little girl of five or six years old, but also possessed of five or six thousand pounds, which a doting husband had left to her own free and unconditional disposal. She loved her child, and would have thought the mere supposition that she could wrong it a cruel slander; and yet in two little years after that husband's death was a weak yet warm-hearted woman persuaded to give her hand and her fortune away, without any settlement being made on the orphan; with no other security for its future than the worthless promises of a selfish, unprincipled man. Too late she discovered her error; her fortune, it was true, proved the nucleus round which a flourishing business quickly gathered, but intimate association with Mr. Denison unblinded her eyes to his real character. First she suspected, and at last she knew, that her money, not herself, had attracted him; wounded affection, remorse, regrets of many sorts, preyed upon her health, till the body's evident decay warned and emboldened her. She prayed—she entreated for some settlement on her child, however small,—pointed out to her indifferent husband how surely new ties on his part would follow her decease,—implored him to save himself from the temptation of neglecting her little Eliza, and so let *her* die in peace; and she sometimes took a higher tone and talked of her child's rights. She grew warm,—angry,—violent it might be; while Mr. Denison was calm himself, mourned over her sad temper, and said “he knew no higher rights than the rights the law gave. The law gave a woman's property to her

husband; yes, even though she were a widow, and the money had come to her from her child's father,—the child, a girl too. Well, had not the girl been taught to call him father? And did she suppose he should turn her out of doors. Besides, he was fond of Eliza, and that she knew very well, and only tried to work upon his feelings, and make him do what he had vowed not to do."

How convenient vows sometimes are!

The mother died of the sure disease that takes such cunning shapes, and has so many names—a broken heart. Her death was rather sudden at last; she had seemed a little better, had been about the house within a day or two. She died gently, life expiring like an exhausted ember, with her arms thrown round her child, who thought "Mamma had fallen asleep," and remained for awhile mute and motionless, in dread of breaking a slumber that was too deep now for joy, or sorrow, or love itself to disturb.

But Death makes its presence known in a language we need no teacher to explain, and presently the child grew frightened, and crept away from the pulseless and nerveless embrace. Eliza Dean was at this period little more than nine years old, but with her mother's death her childhood closed. Henceforth coldness and neglect matured a character naturally sensitive, and prepared the way for deeper sufferings, which, in a like manner, robbed her of her—youth.

From deep night to the glory of morning; from harshest discord to the sweetest harmony; from anarchy and confusion to lovely order, were not passing to a greater contrast than the life of Matthew Warder affords, after glancing at that of his early associate. His wife was a portionless girl, if one may be called so who brings to the altar of marriage, goodness and sense, health, an average share of beauty, and a heart teeming with perfect love and womanly devotion. Instead of

thousands with which to create a business, Matthew Warder had but the slender savings of his salary, and a high character for integrity and energy, with which to begin the world. But the young couple prospered; and made their way at first slowly but surely. Not in London but in Liverpool was Warder established, conducting a quiet rather than a showy business, with latterly a good deal of wholesale dealing. He had neither so fine a house, nor so large an establishment as Mr. Denison, but it might be his means would have better warranted a display of wealth had such been his inclination. Considering his frequent visits to the metropolis, it was a little surprising that the old acquaintances should not have met for nearly twenty years, a period long enough to deepen the lines of any character, and to bring about actions the seeds of which may bear fruit through all the future. It was at the house of a mutual business connection they did meet at last; though it was not only to make purchases Mr. Warder was in town, but rather to settle his eldest son in some first-rate establishment for a year or two, previous to his embarking on his own account in London.

CHAPTER II.

“ Old opinions jarred with new ones ;
 New ones jostled with the old ;
 In such Babel, few were able
 To distinguish truth from fable,
 In the tale their neighbours told.
 But one voice above all others
 Sounded like the voice of ten,
 Clear, sonorous, and persuasive :—
 ‘ Give us justice ! we are men ! ’
 • • • • •

None should patiently endure
 Any ill that he can cure.”—CHARLES MACKAY.

SUNDAY was a great day at Portland Lodge. Mr. and Mrs. Denison's observance of the Sabbath consisted in attending the morning service at the parish church—by means of their carriage of course—and people had said the lady thought more of displaying her fine clothes than of her devotions ; but perhaps they envied her the rich shawls and modish bonnets which she wore. The pair never stirred out afterwards, but received a succession of morning visitors, and generally had guests—sometimes chance-comers—to dinner. The sort of day it was to the servants may be readily imagined.

It was no very great compliment to invite Mr. Warder on an occasion of this sort ; but the curious and intricate diplomacy which induced Mr. Denison to do so, was hinted at in the last chapter. Besides the quiet, perfectly unassuming deportment of his old acquaintance, possibly misled him ; and perhaps it never occurred to his mind that Mr. Warder might have sat at banquets, whose magnificence must dwarf the utmost

splendour of Portland Lodge ; that he had been the honoured guest in those inner circles of society to which wealth alone is not a passport, but to which worth and intelligence only are bidden ; and yet that he would have been content with the homeliest fare, so that he grasped the hand of a friend, and honoured the host.

It happened on this particular occasion, that the party was not a large one. The Denisons' medical attendant, who was a neighbour, and his wife, and one or two individuals who toadied the great man for the sake of his good dinners, were all that appeared. Mr. Warder, according to his promise, arrived long before the dinner hour, and gladly acceded to his host's proposal of taking a stroll in the garden. Here was a favourable opportunity for private and familiar discourse, and the presence of the three blooming children very naturally led Mr. Warder to ask—

“ And my old friend, little Eliza, where is she ? Miss Dean, I should say ; for she must be a woman grown long ago ; married, I suppose, as I do not see her here ? ”

Mr. Denison did not answer for a moment ; nay, he changed colour perceptibly, and with his stick brushed from its stem a beautiful moss-rose that drooped over the path. The gesture was a vexed and impatient one, and he exclaimed—

“ She is not married—at least, not that I know. She has left my house, and Mrs. Denison dislikes to hear her name mentioned. She grew up an obstinate, self-willed girl : altogether turned out very badly.”

“ This is indeed distressing news,” said Mr. Warder with much feeling ; “ but what has she done, can no plan be thought of — ”

“ Hush ! ” replied Mr. Denison, “ do not let the governess hear us talking about her :—they used to be great friends.”

After so evident a hint to change the subject it was

impossible for Mr. Warder to pursue it ; yet his eye wandered involuntarily to Miriam Lowe, as if in the friend's face he might possibly read some tidings of the outcast. The scrutiny, of which the girl herself was quite unconscious, was favourable. It was a thoughtful countenance, not beautiful, certainly, and yet not plain, with a tinge of sadness in it too : but the well-formed chin denoted energy, that might both act and endure ; and the noble arch of the head, across which the thick dark hair was parted by an arrowy line, and braided back, indicated alike integrity and generosity. Mr. Warder was pleased with Miriam, and none the less that her manners were reserved and unaffected. Once or twice he found himself pondering about "poor Eliza," and thinking that her fault could not have been very dark, since she and that girl had been "great friends."

"Well, my dear Sir," said one of the ladies, addressing Mr. Denison, during a pause at dinner, "I hope you have quelled the rebellion in —— Street, and made an example of the impudent creatures?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Denison, "that was easily done. I have discharged the half-dozen who set the agitation on foot, and have vowed to keep open till eleven o'clock instead of ten for the next six months, as a lesson for the remainder."

"Quite right!" exclaimed lady the second; "and I suppose the places of the half-dozen were soon as well filled—no doubt they were the idlest in the house?"

"No, I cannot say that," returned the host; "the worst of it is, they are generally the best servants who make the greatest stir about the Early Closing; they know their value, I suppose, and fancy masters will give way rather than discharge them: but not when they have me to deal with, I can tell you."

Mr. Warder had dropped his knife and fork—perhaps

involuntarily—at this discourse, and Mr. Denison, perceiving that he was listening, addressed him, saying—

“I hope this spirit of mischief and discontent has not travelled to Liverpool. Yet, we have had quite enough of it in London, I can assure you.”

“Do you mean the exertions which are being made to establish an earlier closing of shops in all trades?” asked Mr. Warder.

“Yes, of course.”

“Then, however much we seem to differ in opinion, I must confess that I am proud to say, I have been an active and successful agent in the Movement. In the provincial towns the evils appear to me scarcely so great and cruel as those existing in the metropolis, yet they have been sufficiently deep to call for vigorous and determined measures.”

“And is it possible,” asked Mr. Denison, in a tone of real astonishment, “that you have given way to the clamour, and sacrificed your business, that a set of idle young men may have a few more hours in the week for smoking cigars and indulging in dissipation?”

“I have listened to no clamour but the clamour of my own conscience,” returned Mr. Warder. “I hope *that* I should have obeyed even at a pecuniary sacrifice; but I have not been so tested,—the most accurate calculations have convinced me that no loss is to be apprehended, were business hours to be greatly curtailed.”

“My dear Sir!” seemed the only exclamation Mr. Denison’s astonishment would permit.

“Indeed I mean what I say,” pursued the other. “Were it thoroughly understood that shops closed at six or seven o’clock, purchasers would make their arrangements accordingly, and by no means go without the articles required. It is necessary to insist on this point, before we discuss the other

question—how additional leisure is likely to be employed. Indeed, I am assured there would be no loss to trade were the early closing generally adopted."

"Aye, if all shops closed together."

"And how is this ever to be brought about, unless they who have the power make the first bold stand?"

Mr. Denison shrugged his shoulders, as he murmured something about "having no wish for the honours of martyrdom."

"I deny there is any martyrdom in the case," said his guest, with a smile. "The better educated of the community are in the mass the better people, in more senses than one. It is they who have the most money to spend, at the same time that their hearts are the most open to good feelings, and their minds to common-sense arguments. When the case has been fairly laid before members of this class, I have ever found them warm and eager in their support of those who were fighting the battle of the oppressed; and I hope to live to see the day when it will be a disgrace for a lady to enter a draper's shop in the evening, or send a servant to make purchases of any description at unseemly hours; for though the hardships of the present system are felt the most cruelly in establishments like ours, they fall sufficiently heavy in all trades, to call loudly for redress."

"You forget the numbers of persons, servants, and others," interposed Mr. Denison, "who have no other time for shopping than the evening."

"So far from forgetting them I hold that, next to shopmen and shopwomen themselves, they would derive the chief benefit from the change we propose. Were shops universally closed in the evening, no mistresses or employers could reasonably refuse their servants proper opportunities for making their purchases; and I cannot conceive any circumstance under

which, with proper method and arrangement, this could not be easily done."

"But, my good friend," said Mr. Denison, "how many people in the world, do you suppose, are methodical and considerate?"

"Fewer, certainly, than we could wish," exclaimed Mr. Warder, hopefully, "but for that very reason, we should hail any necessity which would inculcate such habits. It is a curious fact in social ethics, that whatever positively and permanently benefits one class, is of service to several others more indirectly. Thus, I apprehend that from the facility there is in making purchases at all hours, a vast deal of time is lost, which a little forethought would economise. How common it is to send to a shop three times for three several trifling articles, for which one message and one messenger might have sufficed. Time, that universal and most precious heritage, thus saved from waste, would be generally gained."

"But you forget the thousands who live from hand to mouth, and who may not have the money to make their three purchases at once."

"Alas, I have examined the condition of the poor very narrowly, and am painfully aware that they of all the community live the most expensively. For ever the 'turn of the scale' against their ounces of tea and butter—for ever the fractional loss when miserable division becomes lower than the coin of the realm. And for this reason would it be well for them to be forced, even at the price of some seeming inconvenience, to provide for their necessities on a better system. There is, too, another fact, which should not be without its weight. It is notorious that, in our business, purchasers by gas-light are often deceived, not only in the colour, but the quality, of the articles selected; and if we are to admit that these evening shoppers belong to the poorer

classes of the community, so much the more lamentable is it that their little means should miss the objects they had in view while making their outlay. I will not say that it is absolutely a part of their system for shopkeepers to pass off inferior articles by artificial light, but I fear there are too many instances in which the seller permits purchasers to deceive themselves."

Mr. Denison again shrugged his shoulders, thought his guest a little mad, but, paying the customary homage of hypocrisy to virtue, felt it prudent at least to conceal his opinions.

"And I have always thought," continued Mr. Warder, "that small derelictions from perfect integrity usually lead to large ones. This passive deception is very likely to lead the way to a more active sort; and my experience has certainly shown me that what are called shrewd and sharp assistants are very often only cunning and unprincipled ones, quite as ready, when opportunities offer, to cheat their masters as to deceive a customer."

"But let us come to the question," said Mr. Denison, "of the manner in which shopmen do spend that portion of the evening which they call their own."

"You mean," returned Mr. Warder, "the hour or two which they steal from the Night, when with minds and bodies enervated and exhausted, they are at last released from their toil? I must confess they too often resort to the stimulants of dissipation; but before we judge them harshly we should remember that they are free only at the hours when Lectures are over, and Reading Rooms closed; when the social circle round a friend's hearth is breaking up for rest, and when only the tavern or casino opens its wide portals. Let us not judge poor humanity by a standard beyond its grasp; but rather remove the temptations to evil, and give scope to the nobler faculties. The wearied mind is unfit to receive religious

moral, or intellectual instruction, while aching from the monotony of its protracted tension it rushes to some strong excitement for oblivion or distraction. Nor are the physical sufferings which result from over-toil without their moral influences. They work together, bringing death and destruction to tens of thousands. But wherever a fair chance has been given, the results have been most gratifying and encouraging. Healthful energies have been restored, moral and intellectual progress has been made, and all but an insignificant minority have proved themselves worthy of the exertions we are making for them. I do not apologise to the ladies," he added, bowing to Mrs. Denison, "for this lengthened discussion, since I consider the subject one in which they are greatly concerned."

Mrs. Denison, however, was about retiring to the drawing-room; and while the gentlemen continued a conversation which led to future results, she and her confidential acquaintance, the apothecary's wife, indulged in very small talk, exaggerated conjectures about their neighbours' affairs into positive assertions—the usual manner of hatching scandal—and finally commented on Mr. Warder as an "oddity indeed." Yet somehow they did not quite laugh at him, though all unconscious of the spell which wrung from them respect. They agreed, however, that it looked quite absurd for him to rise and open the door when Miriam Lowe was quitting the room.

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CHAPTER III.

"But, for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness."—KEATS.

THE same Sunday; but not from breezy fields or odorous flower-garden came the "breath of air" which two open windows gaped wide to invite.

It was the second-floor in one of those ordinary fourth-rate streets of London, which are for the most part devoted to lodgings; the occupation of a whole house by a single family, and the consequent perpetual absence of card-board announcements in window or on knocker, becoming in such districts an aristocratic privilege. Seated near one of the windows in this second-floor was a young woman apparently about six or seven-and-twenty, with a child on her lap—a little girl of perhaps two or three years old. The slight figure of the former looked still girlish, attired as she was in a light muslin dress of summer colours; yet even had the golden circlet on her finger been hidden, you would have proclaimed them mother and child, so striking was the likeness between them; only the fair pale complexion of the one that bespoke delicate health, and heightened the thoughtful and somewhat anxious expression of her countenance, in the other assumed a positively sickly hue. The long thin arms, instead of presenting the beautiful roundness of healthy infancy, were gnarled and knotted by the visible joints; and the poor weak throat streaked with the blue veins, and showing the sinews like strings, seemed too fragile to support the large head which now rested

on the mother's shoulder. The braids of soft brown hair, and the short lank curls, but a few shades paler, almost mingled; and the full grey eyes were the more alike, that the child's had acquired an expression of precocious intelligence. Suffering has always a maturing hand.

The apartment bore every sign of a good housewife's superintendence. It was neat and clean; the furniture, though not showy, comprised everything necessary for comfort, and a few flowers, a framed engraving or two, and some books not arranged on their shelf so very carefully as to forbid disturbance, were hints of some little taste and cultivation on the part of the occupants. The tea equipage was in readiness, and it was evident the watcher by the window was expecting some one. Not that she could see, without leaning forward, into the street; she sat there only for the air. Presently there was a noise on the stairs, but she had not heard the knock which preceded it. The girl, who combined the office of nurse to the sickly child in its mother's absence, and maid-of-all work, was gone to church, and the people of the house had opened the door.

"Yes," said the voice on the stairs, "as he is not at home, I will see *Mrs. Rivers*," laying an emphasis on her name. "Thank you, I know the way up."

A vexed expression crossed the young mother's face; but she put the child tenderly down, and admitted the visitor.

"Jasper not at home," said he, nodding familiarly as he entered, and glancing round the room with a look that Lizzy too readily interpreted; "will you ask him to call on me the first opportunity he can possibly find; I want to see him very particularly."

"I expect him every moment," said Mrs. Rivers; "will you not sit down until he comes?"

"No, thank you," replied George Harris, for that was the
Toil and Trial.

intruder's name ; " no, thank you, I cannot stay ; my sister is waiting for me at the corner of the street. Don't be angry, but you know I could not bring her in."

Mrs. Rivers did not speak, but merely bowed her head, as in the summer twilight, her visitor added, " good evening," and departed. It might be fancy which lent a tone of insolence to his speech ; and surely there was little in the words themselves that, to a stranger's ear, could have accounted for the emotion they occasioned ; but they had sunk to the hearer's heart like poisoned arrows, and before the young man reached the street, Mrs. Rivers had leaned her face in her hands, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes as if she would rather drive back than wipe away the hot bitter tears which were flowing. The demonstration of her anguish, however, was not thus to be controlled ; five or six minutes passed on, sobs succeeded to the silent weeping, until the little child, in its unconscious sympathy, crept closer to its mother ; pouted its lips preparatory to a burst of tears ; for a wonder was unregarded by her, and not caught in her arms, until she was roused by the shrill wail of infancy's sorrow.

Just then a quick, loud knock reverberated through the house, and the next minute a well-known step was heard ascending two stairs at a time. That rapid step told of a glad return, and was it not a music to charm away the wife's sorrow ? In some measure it was ; but she had not time to dispel the evidence of her recent weeping, or to lull the child to quietness before her husband entered the room.

Now, the lords of the creation—that is to say, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, there being an exception now and then to prove the rule—are always vexed and disconcerted at a woman's tears. A woman, if she surprise the object of her affection, whom it is her privilege to love and console, beneath the pressure of anguish, that forces from their fountain

drops which are no disgrace to manhood's eyes—will kiss them and wipe them away, bid him weep on if tears relieve his heart, wreath her arms round the drooping neck, breathe endearing names and fondest words in his ear, attune her whole soul to sympathy, put by until some future season the gay thoughts which just now hovered on her lips, abide her time for cheering words, and then as with a charm build up the rainbow Hope from out the storm. A man, on the contrary—deny it if ye can, all but the thousandth exception—knits his brow, if not very grimly at any rate perceptibly, tells her “not to give way,” probably adds that he “hates scenes,” and thinks it quite a demonstration of affection if he pats her shoulder and says, “there—there, don't cry.” Well, well, no doubt it is all for the best. In such cases the chances are he has quite as much influence over her as is good for her peace, and there is no knowing what unimagined wells of tenderness might be opened to saturate her heart and reason did he forget self, and melt his soul to sympathy like—a woman.

This may seem a digression ; yet hardly so, if it help me to indicate the mood in which Jasper Rivers beheld his wife's emotion.

“What *is* the matter ?” he exclaimed ; “oh, do hush the child !—is she hurt ?—what is it ?”

“Not hurt,” said the mother, succeeding by this time in quieting the little girl. “The darling ! she only cried because I was weeping.”

“And what on earth has happened to you ? There, no more,” he added, seeing that her lip yet quivered ; “you know, Lizzy, that I hate tears.”

“Then speak kindly to me ; oh, Jasper, pray do ;” and she sank into the arms which had opened at her words to receive her.

Jasper had an affectionate heart, and loved his wife most truly ; and yet had she not, as it were, by the strong effort of instinct, absorbed her tears, tried to smile, and met his glance with a look of forced gaiety, his kiss would not have been half so warm, nor his embrace as tight and fond.

He saw that something had moved her ; but he thought the cause of her tears could not be very sad or deep, as he said again, " What is it my love ?—come, tell me."

" Nothing—nothing," she returned ; " or, if anything, I will tell you by-and-by. It will only vex you now. You shall have some tea in three minutes ; and there's little Ellen has kept wide awake for papa's return : naughty papa, that has not so much as given her a kiss."

Notwithstanding the recent showers, it was a cheerful tea-drinking ; little Ellen sat on her father's knee, and Lizzy looked lovingly at them both. Sickly as the poor child was, the fond mother hoped, almost against hope, that she would yet gain health and strength. Meanwhile, the maid of all work returned from church ; the tea things were removed ; and soon afterwards the weary child was taken to its bed.

Lizzy had not been out since the morning ; and after the warm close day, a walk in the cool evening would have been delicious ; but she knew that Jasper was tired, and she had none of the petty selfishness which would have permitted—much less asked—him to sacrifice his comfort for her pleasure. He had been spending his Sunday, as he very often did, with some rather racketty acquaintances. At Greenwich, or Richmond, or some summer haunt, where half a week's income is very easily drawn from the assistant's or artisan's pocket, as by a magnetic attraction. Lizzy never raised an objection to this bestowal of her husband's one holiday ; after the close confinement of the week, she thought it did him good ; and then he was " so kind ;" he always came home quite early.

Deep-hearted, generous women like her, when they have suffered from the withering want of affection, are so grateful for its smallest tokens, that they seem to take as an alms what the happier and more affluent in love would probably have received as a right. But since they were really and warmly attached, it will be asked why did not Jasper Rivers take his wife with him on these occasions?

For a reason that was very sad and painful. If not wholly free from blame; if they had not exemplified that moral courage which is content to do right and shrink not from any worldly consequence, still were they very much the victims of cruel circumstances. Lizzy, a wife at God's altar, was scarcely a wife in the sight of the world; so closely and systematically had their marriage been kept secret. Unhappily the Sunday parties which Jasper joined, were too often made up of those whose position *was* what theirs *seemed*, and according to the one-sided ethics of social life, Jasper could associate familiarly with persons whom it would have stung him to the quick to call the friends of his Wife.

Surely but a small fraction of the public can be aware of a by-law which prevails among a large mass of the Metropolitan Employers, a prejudice as stupid as it is heartless, against married servants.* Alas, there is no despotism in the world so tyrannous as that of custom, when custom is led and sanctioned by those in authority; and had Jasper Rivers acknowledged his marriage with Eliza Dean, he might have wanted bread. And yet the pain, the contumely, the myriad evils of a false position from which for three years they had suffered,—cannot they be guessed from Lizzy's ready tears that Sunday evening?

She gave her husband the message of George Harris,

* We are informed that of the 40,000 Drapers' Assistants in London, there are but 400 married men.

adding, "I wonder you did not meet him ;—he was here not five minutes before you came home."

"And did he find you in tears?" asked Jasper, "come, Lizzy, tell me what you were crying for."

After some little hesitation Lizzy told ; repeating the words of George Harris—describing the emphasis he laid upon her name, and the pointed manner in which he had alluded to his "sister" waiting for him in the street,—his sister who must not for a moment be brought into contact with her.

Jasper Rivers bit his lip until the self-inflicted pain roused his sullen anger into words. "My poor Lizzy," he exclaimed with tenderness, "you have suffered long enough,—there shall be an end of this insolence,—not another day shall pass,—to-morrow, whatever the result, I will declare our marriage."

"Jasper," said his wife, leaning her head on his shoulder, and struggling with the tears that were again in her eyes, "pause, dearest, before you act. Do not come to a decision under excitement of feeling ; I can bear what I have borne,—anything while you love me."

"While I love you !"

"Forgive me, dear Jasper, if my words sounded like a reproach. It is the strangeness of my position which makes me tremble for the continuance of your affection ; that affection which under happier circumstances, I have the vanity to think I should have known how, certainly, to keep."

"And do you think I do not love you as well as ever?" exclaimed Rivers, and his tenderness of manner was dashed by the slightest possible tone of pique.

"I feel that you have been a miracle of kindness and devotion to me," said his wife, "considering that circumstances have been like a strong tide setting against our happiness. The predictions of the two or three true friends who advised us to delay our marriage until it could be avowed, have not

been verified in the manner which I pictured their words to mean ; and yet have they been worked out, if less bitterly, certainly with a curious originality that makes me understand how it is that the only experience we ever profit by, is our own. We have been happy, but think how much our happiness would have been increased had you seen reflected on me the respect which the honest wife of every honest man may claim as a right. For instance, how different would your companions often be, if yours could be mine : how differently, I think, would to-day have been passed — ”

“ Ah,” interrupted Jasper, “ and how much more happily. I was inexcusable again to leave you.”

“ Not inexcusable, for I excused you, but during the last six months, since I tasted the happy change from drudgery nearly equal to yours, to daily labour not beyond my powers—since I have had a little time in the twenty-four hours to *think*, many things have become clear to me. Among others I perceive the infinite wisdom of that ordination, which has joined us, and yet whose happiest consequences, the concealment of our marriage has gone far to thwart.”

“ And yet, Lizzy, you tell me to pause before I act ! ”

“ Are you brave enough to meet the trial which may ensue ? —that is all,” said Lizzy, after a moment’s hesitation, and with emotion.

“ I ought to be so,” replied her husband. “ Ah, Lizzy, I think you little guess the self-reproach I have often felt, and which has driven me to seek forgetfulness in company and excitement. Do you think I can look at our child without remorse—that I can see a rosy, healthy infant without a sort of bitter envy—or think even of Ellen without knowing how we wronged her, concealing her very existence from the world, intrusting her to the neglectful hireling, and fancying that because I paid largely for her support, a parent’s duty was

performed. Oh, Lizzy, I have been a contemptible coward, it is you only who have shown firmness and courage."

Jasper spoke with strong emotion, and, indeed, his wife had more than once remarked—that allusion to their child—especially to the period of its birth—occasioned more evident pain than even she could account for;—and sometimes summoned an expression of anguish to his countenance that she had never otherwise observed.

Lizzy's was, indeed, the woman's courage of patient endurance and of action, when action became imperative. So long as she believed her child was tenderly cared for, she endured the separation, visiting it stealthily, and at distant intervals—like a thief his treasure—at the nurse's home. It was not very soon that the mismanagement of the poor infant became apparent,—mismanagement partly arising from the woman's ignorance, partly from her want of principle, and very terrible in its results. There is hardly a sadder sight in the world than to witness the decay of a child; it seems one of the harshest reversals of Nature's beautiful plan. When we see the old and feeble—them who have survived the rupture of the heart's tendril ties, which it seems alone bind us to life,—fading and drooping towards the grave, who can help thinking of the words of the American poet, "It was his time to die;" and rejoicing over the merciful decree which gives the weary traveller rest at last. Or—for it is folly's reckoning which measures life by the number of years we have breathed—when they whom suffering and sensation have placed among the sages, are summoned to the unknown sphere, who does not feel that perchance their destinies have been more amply fulfilled than that of the rustic who has vegetated a hundred years? But to see the withering of the bud that never shall blossom,—the human creature that on earth shall never develope; to whom the mysteries of life shall never be

set as a riddle to propound ; to see the young child the prey of disease, might surely dash with sadness the heart of the gay or callous.

Poor Lizzy's child was the victim of early neglect ; orphaned by cruel circumstances—not death.

If I sketch the sharp outlines of the mother's life, every heart capable of sympathising with its lights and shades will readily supply such details. Orphaned, verily indeed, as has been said, at nine years old, the hard rather than harsh step-father, the careless imperfect education, the step-father's second marriage, the yet more miserable home, the earnest honest nature that longed for independence, and accepted employment in the only manner that appeared possible—namely in Mr. Denison's establishment, were the links of the heavy chain which enthralled her destiny. In daily toil, but lightly relieved, was her youth passed, and little was her guerdon ; for though far cleverer than the generality of her associates, and fit for the responsible position in which, indeed, Mr. Denison found her well nigh invaluable, he so little dreamed she could ever thwart his will, that it was not worth while to pay her in the coin of kindness and thanks. But our acts are their own avengers, and in this instance her heart was all the more open to yield to the yet almost untasted sweetness of affection. Love came as a conqueror, indeed.

But the step-father could not consent to her marriage—nay, could not think of such a thing. Now he discovered that Eliza Dean should mate higher than with one of his assistants—why, then, had he placed her on an equality with them ? This was not all—he would not have married men in his house, and Jasper Rivers had no fortune with which to begin business for himself. In the disagreements which ensued, Jasper threw up his situation, hoping to obtain one in some house where a wiser and kinder rule prevailed. Alas ! he was not so

fortunate. And Jasper had a mother nearly dependent on him, and, like scores of others, could not afford to wait and choose a genial sphere of employment.

Then came the marriage, so close and secret, that appearances almost denied it. But the loving and beloved wife could give up the world, that was little; she could toil on for their mutual support, that was nearly nothing; but the manner of her toil was much. Where people have a strong will, a way to accomplish their wishes is often found, and Jasper and Lizzy had contrived to find engagements in the same establishment. There were some comforts and pleasures connected with this arrangement, and yet it brought with it many unforeseen trials. How hard was it for the wedded pair to pass for common acquaintances; and, to their credit be it said, they played their parts indifferently. But this very sincerity brought about the most cruel suspicions, and Lizzy had the pain of knowing that the truth or falsehood of them was considered of little or no consequence. For the Late-hour system, with its long train of evils, prevailed in their Employers' establishment, and the lax principles *which are never divided from it*. Hence her suspected relation with Jasper Rivers attracted neither wonder nor reproach.

It was a few months before our story opens, that Lizzy's health had, as it were, suddenly broken under the pressure of her protracted toil. Sudden seemed the attack, but for years probably her system had been undermined. At a pecuniary sacrifice so great, that had she been dependent on her own salary she could not have lived, she succeeded in making a new arrangement, by which she was released at six o'clock. And even this concession was made as an unprecedented favour, though in reality it was a boon yielded to the skill and cleverness that rendered her nearly indispensable,—not by any means arising from an impulse of kindness.

How often in life do events crowd and crush together, changing even the aspects of each other, and letting us perceive the manner in which good springs from seeming evil ! It was at this very time that, like an arrow, came the conviction that their child must die, unless it had some portion of a mother's care,—unless poor Lizzy claimed it. This was done, though in the most private manner possible. A new happiness seemed given to her heart; a new life breathed into her spirit, even by its mere presence; and the little creature visibly rallied, and hope grew strong in the parents' hearts. Who can tell how much the mother's pining under the "endurance of absence" might have helped to undermine her health; or who can declare how much the seeming recovery of her missing treasure might have called back the faint roses—they were never very deep ones—to her cheeks ! Doubtless comparative rest had been the great restorer of her health; but comparative happiness had assuredly borne a part in the cure; and he is a poor physician who in his treatment divorces the body from the mind.

CHAPTER IV.

"In life,
With timid steps, and blind and blundering strife,
We little dream the rough stairs we would flee,
Might prove the ladder of prosperity."—C. C.

It was the beginning of a bright and glowing summer's day—that Monday morning. As usual, Jasper Rivers and his wife left home between seven and eight o'clock; Lizzy previously giving the most exact directions to the maid-of-all-work respecting the care of the child—how she was to be taken into the Park before the heat of noon came on, and again at five or six o'clock, apportioning the hours for sleep and food with precise attention. With their minds full of the coming disclosure they naturally talked about it, wondering what the result would actually be, and scarcely realising that this might be the last time they should thus walk together, threading the same streets, as they had done, till every stone and post had become an acquaintance; usually parting at the piece of dead wall, whence sometimes one and sometimes the other made the longer circuit to their destination, thus arranging not to arrive together. This was only one of twenty petty degrading plans that had become a habit, and called not for either thought or comment.

For obvious reasons they had not chosen their residence very near the house of business; and many were the streets and squares through which they passed. London hardly seems the same city early in the morning if compared with what it is at the hours when fashion and business make a flush-tide of

movement, noise, and excitement. The mansion on one side of — Square threw long shadows that nearly touched the garden railing, while the windows on the others all more or less gleamed in the sunshine of a June morning. But in this spot there was little sign of activity; the upper casements closed and curtained told of the protracted slumbers of them who neither “toil nor spin.” Here and there a stout serving woman might be seen cleaning a door-way with the indolent action of one who had abundant leisure; and heard, too, as you came near, for silence was scarcely broken by the twitter of the smoke-begrimed sparrows, whose only Arcadia was the dusty foliage of the square. To be sure now and then a cab rattled rapidly along, bearing an early traveller to or from some railway station, and telling that the day was coming on. In the great thoroughfares much more was doing, and nothing less. Windows were being burnished as well as door steps, and scores of youths and young women were unfolding dainty wares, and often displaying in their arrangement a taste and tact that seemed a power dwarfed from the height of an artist’s invention to the mechanic’s skill. Not ten hours previously had these same ribbons, and silks and laces been folded and put away for the short night, and now the routine of the long—long day was commencing with their re-adjustment.

Not even a philanthropic enthusiast however, who dreams of Utopia, and measures all humanity by the standard of his own benevolent heart, would urge that there is any wrong or oppression in the “dressing” a shop window in the morning, or folding away the goods which have been displayed in the evening: but—and what a mighty hinge is that little word—right or wrong, justice or oppression, all hang on the hour at which the latter duty is performed. Every human heart has its separate world—the world of its own individuality; but what a world must that be when very nearly every waking

hour is consumed by the same monotonous toil! In occupation that is not mechanical enough to leave the mind at liberty for healthy action; and yet not sufficiently mental to exercise the higher faculties or rouse the dormant energies. How *can* the voice of the spirit be heard? how *can* the inner life of the soul flow on with purity in such an unnatural career? Every surrounding thing must be distorted from its just position; trifles which should seem but the accidents of life, grow monstrous in their mien; and the great purposes of existence must, almost of necessity, dwindle to a hazy distance, and to insignificant dimensions, like a noble object seen through an inverted telescope.

Although the same walk had been taken, and the same things had been seen by Lizzy and her husband hundreds of times, and consequently seldom arrested their attention, yet latterly they had noticed what was passing around them much more than when the novelty of many circumstances might have been supposed to strike them, and somehow on this particular morning they seemed more than ever alive to what was going on.

"Street after street, it is the same story," said Jasper, with a sigh; and he added, "well, I suppose we ought to find comfort in knowing there are thousands who suffer as much as ourselves."

"My dear Jasper," exclaimed his wife, "think a moment, and I am sure you will never say that again. Is it not extraordinary that such an argument can ever be put forth? Surely, the very fact that thousands do suffer ought to rouse us to the heartier exertions, and make us the more willing martyrs in the cause, if need be."

"Lizzy," he replied, turning towards her, and almost stopping in the street as he spoke, "I always thought you the *most* sensible woman I have ever known, but latterly you have

often surprised me. You seem to have so many just opinions, which strike me as much by their freshness as their truth."

"I am afraid," said Lizzy, with a smile, "that my opinions are not very profound; but latterly, as I told you yesterday, I have had a little time to *think*; and as I had previously *suffered* many sorts of sorrow, therefore my thoughts may be the better worth remembering. But here we are at — Street; we had better separate. Yet wait a moment; I declare I had forgotten my ring. Hold my glove dear, I will be quick."

And Jasper held her glove, while Lizzy drew off her wedding-ring, and suspended it to a black ribbon she constantly wore round her neck, and to which alone was visibly attached a locket, containing the hair of her dead mother. With the adroitness of long habit, the slender golden badge was carefully hidden nearer her heart. Now this necessary operation was a perpetual annoyance to Jasper Rivers; but one of which his wife was so unconscious, that it was a mere accident whether it was performed in his presence or not. There is a petty frantic jealousy about most men, with which women, calm in the haven of confidence, find it hard to sympathise; and, perhaps, it was a dim suspicion of this fact, which made him half ashamed to betray the irritation this trifling circumstance occasioned; but it galled him none the less. He felt as if by the withdrawal of her ring she ceased to belong to him; as if she fell away from his care and protection into the shadow of a doubtful position, and just in proportion as it ought to have been cheered by the light of his perfect confidence, unfortunately a host of fretful fancies invaded his peace. Lizzy often wondered that in the hours of business he should show an irritation of temper she but seldom witnessed at home; yet little suspected that the stray look or careless word of another, might have occasioned the ebullition.

Jasper Rivers had resolved on the disclosure of his marriage

this very day, and to abide the consequences whatever they might be; but he had also determined, out of consideration to Lizzy's feelings, to wait until she had left in the evening, and then to seek an opportunity of speaking to one of the partners. There is an old adage, however, about "man's proposing;" that is oftener found true than the generality of musty sayings, one half of which have as little veracity as wit for their foundation.

It was early in the afternoon, just at the hour or two which precede the fashionable time for shopping, when assistants, no doubt, heartily wish a few of their evening customers would drop in, to occupy that vacant time,—time in which it is one of the absurdities of their vocation to *seem busy*, if only by employing themselves in rolling and unrolling silks or ribbons—instead of coming at night to exhaust yet more their drooping energies and weary limbs, when overtaxed nature calls loudly for repose. There were only three or four absolute purchasers in the spacious shop, though two or three ladies without the intention of laying out five shillings were giving a vast deal of trouble, one perhaps from sheer *ennui*, and difficulty in killing time, of which—happy mortal—she had too much on her hands; another perhaps from that curious liking which weak women often evince to feast their eyes on finery their shallow means can never command; or, as the medium of keeping an appointment with some female gossip, who would have done the like had she arrived first, for this is a common trick, as the drapers know very well. Does it never occur to women that they are acting as false a part, that they are themselves as contemptible cheats, as the tradesmen they reprobate for "puffing" a bad article, or declaring they are selling at cost price, when netting thirty per cent.? Time and trouble are—or ought to be—to every human being, at least, as precious as pure gold.

Now it so happened that on this particular morning Jasper

Rivers had experienced something more than his full share of the irritations and annoyances such thoughtless visitors occasion ; and it might be the excitement and anxiety of mind he was enduring had made him a little less patient than usual. He had found himself annoyed, too, because a fellow-assistant had lifted down a heavy bale of goods for Lizzy's convenience, with an air and a manner in his opinion by several shades too familiar ; though it is surprising how he managed to witness the transaction at all, being at the moment busy measuring off black satin for a prosy old lady, who was asking him three questions in a breath. But he saw it all, and, moreover, thought his wife had no occasion to express herself so very much obliged for such a common act of courtesy. All this was in his mind, mingled with silent anathemas against the last silly woman who had engaged him,—and who, after occupying him three-quarters of an hour, and leaving him work for quite that time to come in the re-adjustment of goods he had unfolded for her inspection, had discovered she only wanted a yard of ribbon—when an individual entered the shop, who on the first glance might have been described as, and was mistaken for, a gentleman. His coat was of superfine cloth ; his hat an unmistakeable beaver ; boots that looked suspiciously Parisian, and gloves that might have been so, completed his adornments, while from his breast depended an eye-glass, and from a neighbouring pocket the corner of a highly-scented cambric handkerchief ; could a clair-voyant have peeped a little deeper he would have discovered a cardcase enclosing half-a-dozen pasteboard fac-similes on which the word "Honourable" was very legibly engraved. Moreover he *was* the personage there designated, which fact I mention, lest from the mode of his introduction, the reader might suspect him for a thief in disguise. Nothing of the sort. I don't suppose he would even have cheated at cards, much less committed an act that would

have been breaking the law in a vulgar way and without adequate temptation; though what he might have been if born of rogues and vagabonds, the heir to their ignorance, vices, and temptations, instead of inheriting the comfortable appanage of a wealthy peer's younger son, is quite another question.

Addressing one of the young men the stranger drew forth a written paper, which proved to be a list of articles he required for a lady going abroad very suddenly. Three or four were promptly supplied; but some vagueness in the description of those which followed induced the assistant to call Lizzy to the counsel, deeming that as they were made-up goods, her feminine experience would be of value. It was; she understood what the lady had meant immediately, and the stranger seemed tacitly given up for her to attend. Really this lady friend had shown a poor judgment in giving him her commission, or else he assumed dulness of comprehension for the sake of the amusement he fancied he could create. Lizzy tried to explain the mystery of a pelerine and the proper folding of a shawl, and some muttered, insinuated compliment about their suiting such a figure as hers, drew the blood to her cheek, and heightened the expression of a countenance, which naturally calm, was perhaps already that day more than usually animated by the busy anxious thoughts at her heart.

Jasper was near enough to recognise the blush, but not to hear the words which had called it forth; and still he continued rolling up the silks and satins which his profitless customer had disarranged. So vigorously, too, that once or twice in the process he startled every one near by the manner in which the wooden roller thumped the counter. Furtively and rapidly from time to time he looked at Lizzy, and once he caught a loving glance, which he misinterpreted as an appeal

for protection. It was no such thing. Had she spoken, her words would have been shaped to an entreaty that he would smother his wrath and endure. The thing in superfine cloth was now selecting several pairs of lace cuffs, and feigning to be very anxious to learn how they fastened, almost insisted on her showing him on her own wrist. With a reluctance that ought to have been chilling she complied; and certainly the delicate lace did show to advantage her small, white, ringless left hand. The stranger's compliment was audible now; and more—he made a gesture as if to touch the hand—the better no doubt to examine the cuff. But it was too quickly withdrawn for such pollution; and the next instant—at the very moment that a hotter and more indignant blush than the first crimsoned Lizzy's cheek, the hard knuckles of a hand that was neither weak nor small were insinuated between his throat and his elegant cravat, and he found himself hurled by Jasper Rivers against the opposite counter.

The hubbub and riot which ensued may be imagined. Lizzy neither fainted nor screamed; but divining that now the disclosure must come, she instinctively hid her face in her hands, and made her way to where two or three young women were clustered. In sorrow, terror, insult—in every exciting moment of life, how naturally woman flies to her own sex for sympathy and protection; alas, alas! that they should ever be denied! Her companions clustered affectionately round Lizzy, and their kind words brought the tears to her eyes. Meanwhile the junior partner, who was really the most important in the firm, had been summoned by the "shop-walker," the chief tyrant of the house, to the scene of action, and, with a loud voice and angry gesture, demanded how Jasper Rivers dared attack the "gentleman."

"The *gentleman*," said Jasper, speaking with the concentrated calmness of strong passion, laying an emphasis on the

word, and pointing to the individual referred to, who, for the whole affair occupied but a minute, had not yet recovered from the shock—"the gentleman insulted my wife!"

Amid the storm there was a moment's lull; and the different countenances around, each bearing the impress of the one emotion—surprise, would have been an interesting study for a painter. But the Employer had a double cause for anger, and it broke forth very speedily. Not only by the transgression of the law against married men had a dangerous example been set, but—a customer had been offended, and, perhaps, he would now refuse to take the twenty pounds' worth of goods already selected. Of course, the only method of conciliation was to adopt prompt and decisive measures with the culprits. With a brief but bitter harangue on the enormity of their conduct, they were dismissed now and for ever; while the "gentleman" muttered something about "caning, horsewhipping, and kicking the impertinent scoundrel," whom "he would have put in the hands of the police did he not consider the loss of his situation might, perhaps, be punishment enough." The abject apologies of the master conciliated him so far that he paid for the articles he had selected, and left the shop, expressing his sorrow for the young woman, whom he pitied for being tied to such a brute.

Jasper and Lizzy quite astonished the maid-of-all-work by returning home in the middle of the day; and to be there together by daylight seemed "like Sunday." Yet how pleasant it would have been could the dark cloud of Care have been kept out of sight! Something must be done, and promptly, that they knew, and Lizzy had a plan in her head which she would not tell to Jasper unless it succeeded. His private purse, and her housekeeping one, were emptied on the table, and the joint contents proved to be three pounds fourteen and *sixpence*. But happily they were not in debt; the money for

their rent had been put away for some weeks past, and surely they must be able to earn their living in one way or another.

"I wonder what George Harris wants with me," exclaimed Jasper; "he is no great favourite of mine; but perhaps I judge him hardly. How vexatious that it is no use calling on him till nearly midnight—it would have been such a blessing for once to go to bed at ten o'clock."

"There's little Ellen's money-box," said Lizzy, whose mind appeared running on immediate ways-and-means. I'm sure there must be above ten shillings in it—and dear Miriam long ago made me promise that I would not want such a sum as five pounds without asking her to lend it me. I hope we may not want her help—but of this I am sure she will be heartily glad at what has happened to-day."

"I wish the manner of the disclosure had been different," murmured Jasper: "it is evident no one believes that I meant to make it this evening."

CHAPTER V.

"Nature does

Never wrong : 'tis society which sins.
Look on the bee upon the wing among the flowers ;
How brave, how bright his life ! Then mark him hived,
Cramped, cringing in his self-built social cell,
Thus is it in the world-hive : most where men
Lie deep in cities as in drifts—death-drifts,
Nosing each other like a flock of sheep ;
Not knowing and not caring whence nor whither
They come or go, so that they fool together."—Festus.

"I TELL you I won't go with you ; I am expecting some one to call."

The speaker was George Harris, who addressed a fellow assistant ; the time eleven o'clock at night ; the scene a large low-roofed chamber in Mr. Denison's town house. It was the only and general sitting-room for the people in his service ; and perhaps as their leisure was so very brief, it had been deemed of little or no consequence whether ordinary comfort was secured to them or not. It was a low-roofed chamber, because at the time Mr. Denison threw three houses into one ; composed new windows of enormous squares of plate glass ; and covered the inner shop—whither his best customers were always shown—with Brussels carpet, it had been deemed expedient for producing a graceful effect to raise the ceiling of the shop many feet. How else could costly shawls, and rich silks be draped in sweeping folds to show their magnificence ? or the gorgeous chandeliers suspended, that even in the summer time blazed for hours, deteriorating still more an atmosphere terribly vitiated by much breathing through the long day ? Of course, precisely the number of

feet given to the shop, was taken from the next floor, without a moment's thought of the health or convenience of the scores of human beings to whom it would be appropriated.

It is true these alterations in the building took place some years ago, before sanitary regulations attracted even the small degree of attention they do at present; but nine-tenths of the evils against which philanthropists and men of science are waging war, were born of ignorance, and have been fostered by a near-sighted and mistaken selfishness. There may be excuse for one who has occasioned misery, by saying "he did not know the consequences of his deed;" but this brings no remedy for the suffering he has entailed; and the excuse only holds good while the ignorance remains,—not an hour longer. Mr. Denison had heard it "dinned into his ears" season after season, that the health of his young men suffered from the myriad evils which swelled the train of his narrow system; that the deaths which a coroner's verdict would doubtless have given as from natural causes, really proceeded from an unnatural mode of life; that the sickness which was never absent, and took such similar forms, aggravated or ameliorated according to individual circumstances, might be prevented; and that the cruel absence of all things which make up the comfort of home, was spreading a snare of temptation to the young and inexperienced, was working a course of corruption in all, and sowing the seeds of future evil, which should arise like the Indian tree that is for ever sending forth new roots from its myriad branches, and widening the circle of its influence. Was he to be excused because the system had been partially organised in ignorance?

Thanks be to God! and thanks to His instruments, the clear-minded, brave-hearted workers, who have found their tasks, and are "doing them!" the light has dawned—is beginning to stream in on the abodes of suffering and

ignorance: the better time must come; let it be ours to expedite its arrival. Curious is it, that wherever the late-hour system prevails—the fact will bear repetition—a monstrous train of wrong is always found; as if the souls so mean and narrow, as not to recognise its error, must perforce succumb to all the rest.

It may be surmised who was the expected visitor; but before Jasper Rivers arrives, it will be well to glance at the occupants of that apartment, and briefly note the manner in which they were engaged. The room was well-lighted though by a single jet of gas, the same being protected, not shaded, by a tall, narrow, clear, glass shade. A large table had been drawn immediately under the light, probably by the three or four young men, who were seated at it letter-writing, and about as many who had been reading there steadily. But the table seemed an object of dispute, and one by one the readers had dropped off into corners, throwing their feet upon chairs, or lounging about in an uncomfortable-looking manner, either continuing to read, or talking in an under tone to a companion. Even from the stairs the unintelligible buzz of these many voices could be heard. The table was at present half occupied by a party of card-players, whose noisy exclamations, and vigorous demonstrations of hand and elbow on the board, must have been not a little distracting and vexatious to the scribes.

Near them, at a much less table, lounged two inveterate smokers, looking lords of a small domain, with power to annoy all neighbouring potentates. A jug of hot water, glasses, and a long-necked bottle, were accompaniments to the cigars; and the odour of spirits, mingling with the fumes of tobacco, made a villanous compound to penetrate the lungs and veins of those who had been breathing a sufficiently impure atmosphere *during the rest of the twenty-four hours*. But this hetero-

geneous party did not comprise half the assistants who resided in the house ; the remainder had rushed away, when the shop at last closed. And whither ? Scarcely to walk, though the pure air would have been refreshing and salutary, for fifteen hours' standing does not incline the most active to a further exertion of their limbs.—To the reading-room, or lecture-hall ? These are long since closed.—To the pleasant, social circle of the intimate friend or relative ? It is breaking up for healthful repose.

And, perchance, in that social circle, there is one form whose memory was a haunting presence to some young heart, and might have been a beacon-star of hope to guide it through shoals and breakers ; but the cloud of compelled absence weighs heavier and heavier ; it obscures the light, and the near, the real, the positive, chases back by degrees that spirit-presence. In the sanctuary of the parents' home, the recognised lover might have basked in the pure beams of true and loving eyes ; have drawn new strength for coming exertions from the hopes half hidden in their depths ; have felt all high resolves grow firmer and clearer beneath the spell of her approving words. But the roses are still on those cheeks ; they have not been worn away by fashion's follies, or late-hour toil ; the lids are drooping over those pure eyes at the accustomed time for rest ; and if she be dreaming soon, it will not be of him. Perchance the looks of love ; the silvery tones of encouragement are for another ; some happier, and it may be, worthier one.

Oh, how common a tale ! While for him who, erring though he be, might have been good and pure and happy, who needs for special prayer that he be not " led into temptation,"—there are bright eyes still waking,—alas, alas, but not for beacon lights ;—and silvery tones are ringing with a mocking song, like, but far sadder than, the Sirens',—the One song of the

betrayed in turn betraying ;—and painted roses bloom on faded cheeks, masking the charnel within, like withered flowers upon a sepulchre !

George Harris was not in the best of humours,—and his most amiable mood had nothing in it superlatively gracious,—and he was lounging about in a restless manner, that clearly indicated his fretful, anxious impatience. He was too sulky to talk : but he chanced to overhear a conversation that was more interesting to him than the speakers imagined.

“ Have you heard what a row there has been at Trong’s to-day,” said one of the young men to another ; and at the name of Jasper Rivers’ Employers George Harris bent all his powers to listen, unobserved, but attentively.

“ No ;—what’s the matter ? ” replied his companion.

“ I don’t suppose you remember Rivers, do you ? ” continued the first speaker, “ he was before your time I think.”

“ No, but I have heard of him, and I think I have seen him with some of the fellows.”

“ Well, only think after all, he is married to Denison’s step-daughter. It was found out to-day. He got jealous of somebody in the house who was always dangling after her, and thought that a gentleman customer was much too civil. He made a fool of himself by going into a passion ; and then took a short cut out of one scrape into another by owning the marriage. Of course they were both sent off immediately.”

As well pass a kaleidoscope from hand to hand and expect no trembling touch will alter its aspect, as think to hear a story from mouth to mouth literally and accurately repeated. On the whole the tale thus told had more than the average of truth which belongs to gossip ; and the broad facts were all that it concerned George Harris to know.

“ Yes, it’s an eleventh commandment, not to marry,” said the *one who had been* addressed, “ though why nobody attempts to

explain. Don't they say it was that love affair that made them turn away the women here, and resolve to have no more either in or out of the house."

"Yes; before then we were only half brutes, and now we are brutes entirely. Do you know I wish sometimes I'd joined the Early Closing Association—"

"Yes, and lost your situation like the fellows who were turned adrift the other day," interrupted his companion.

"Well, they have got others, better ones too, and for that matter they could not be much worse. Certainly the looking forward to something different from our present slavery, and the very trying to get it, rouses one's mind, keeps one out of mischief; whereas the perpetual din, din, of 'Be contented,—thousands are as badly off as yourself,—thousands would be glad to get employment on any terms,' somehow crushes one down to a mere machine. I begin to understand what the men who made the stir meant by preaching up their doctrine of *wholesome discontent*. Why, if the world had been *content* with mud huts we should never have had houses, or with skins of beasts for raiment, we should never have had broad-cloth."

George Harris could hardly refrain from an audible chuckle as he listened to this speech. Naturally of a sordid mind, which a judicious education might have improved and enlarged, but which a narrow one had still further degraded, the sufferings he had endured had borne a deadly fruit, instead of arousing him to generous struggles and honest indignation. It is no bad test of character to judge a person by his belief in humanity; he who has no elements of nobility in his own heart will have small faith in the nobleness of others; and Harris judged of his fellow-creatures by the miserable specimen of humanity he himself afforded. He had been a slave for the brightest years of his youth; but so far from seeking that such slavery should be abolished, he would have thought

himself cheated out of a possible right—the right of being a tyrant in turn—the only goal to which his worldly hopes very definitely pointed. His degradation completed by the system to which he was a victim, he would have thought employers “fools” to loosen the reins so long as they could be tightly grasped; and knowing very well that additional leisure would be for him only a wider license for demoralising indulgences, he had no belief that in any other cases liberty would be very differently enjoyed. And yet, like the generality of such persons, he was a thorough hypocrite, cautiously observing the semblance of good conduct, and so positively enjoying the respectable character he very generally bore, that probably his powers of deception were practised even on himself, and that he believed he deserved it.

It has taken long to describe the scene in the assistants' room that memorable evening; yet after all Harris had but a few minutes to wait for Jasper Rivers' arrival. It might be the sixth or eighth time that since his marriage the latter had visited a house associated with so many mingled recollections. He had not been there very lately; indeed few of his old associates remained in the establishment; some had “bettered themselves;” and some, difficult as it may be to imagine, had done the reverse—disheartened, corrupted, too hardly tried, too sorely tempted, they had dropped out of a recognised circle of society into the dark and dangerous void beyond. Sickness had laid prostrate several; and Death had carried off three or four in the early prime of their years.

It was always with a disagreeable feeling that Jasper Rivers entered beneath Mr. Denison's roof; not that he felt there was any real harm in visiting an acquaintance resident there, and not that there was any chance of his visit being discovered to the potentate of Portland Lodge. No one loved the master *well enough* to tell him truth when there might be some

purpose in concealing it; and as most of the assistants had some habit, or circumstance to hide, they acted upon the principle of not "throwing stones" lest their own "glass houses" should be damaged. Even Mrs. Chippin found it more to her advantage to keep any secrets that fell in her way than to betray them; since she drew a considerable revenue from small douceurs, given generally ostensibly as a recompense for some slight favour; but springing in most cases from that sort of gratitude which has been well described as "a lively sense of favours to come." After all, the services she turned to so profitable an account were only the fulfilment of her duty, or, at most, acts of common humanity. Such as keeping the remnant of a joint of meat, or a few slices from it warm, for the young men chained to the counter during the dinner time; or arranging that the victims of a later hour should have at last a refreshing cup of tea, instead of "slop" or "water shown to the tea-leaves." Fortunate mortals, accustomed to the appliances of a regular well-ordered home, who accept their daily comforts as a matter of course, and receive them with as little thought as that with which they bask in the light of Heaven, may smile at the idea of men making serious troubles of these "petty" grievances: but subject the favourites of fortune to the same daily irritations, for weeks instead of years, and they would soon cease to consider them "petty."

"I am glad you are come," said George Harris, putting out his hand, as Jasper entered the room, "it is an age since I have seen you. Shall we take a stroll together?" he continued, with a glance that expressed he had something private to say.

"As you please," replied Rivers; "but first let me ask if any one here knows of a situation. It would be a kindness to tell me of one, for I have lost mine to-day,"

"No, that I don't."—"I'm sure I don't," was chorused round the room, while one of the pair already mentioned, added—

"Ah, we heard the story of your leaving. A pretty sly fellow you are, to be married, and no one to know a word about it."

"You have heard the story," exclaimed Jasper. "News travels quickly; well, I was on the point of telling it you myself, so that trouble is saved: but I am very glad of the opportunity of mentioning, that I have been married between three and four years."

"I am sure I wish I had known it," murmured Harris, and his cheek colouring in spite of his usual effrontery. "If I have ever treated the lady with a want of respect, you must make allowance for my ignorance of the fact, and of very suspicious appearances. Only yesterday—"

"Only yesterday," interrupted Jasper, but speaking in the same low tone, "you used language which my first impulse was bitterly to resent. But though it occasioned my resolve to disclose the truth, I did make the allowance you demand; and you see, I am here according to your request. If we are to walk, let us go."

"I may as well," said Harris, as soon as they were fairly in the street, "I may as well come to the point at once. I want you to take charge for a week or two of some packages; you shall be paid for your trouble—only, ask no questions. You understand?"

"I will *not* take charge of anything under such conditions," said Jasper, promptly and firmly, and dropping the arm of his companion, as he spoke.

"Hey-day! you need not be so grand about it," returned the other, "it is only what you did two or three years ago; but *then* I suppose you wanted a five-pound note, whereas, probably,

now the nice pickings you have had at Trong's, and which you have kept all to yourself, have made you much too fine a person to help a friend, or share the least portion of his danger."

"And this is my punishment," said Jasper, bitterly, and with anguish, that showed as something almost womanly in the trembling of the voice, and in his efforts to subdue an emotion made up of indignation and regret. "This is my punishment for the hour of weakness when I was assailed by keen temptation. Years of remorse, of self-contempt, and of fear, have not been enough of retribution. I must bear even this from you."

For answer, George Harris gave vent to a low chuckling laugh; but a better spirit than vain regret was meanwhile asserting the mastery in Jasper's heart, and in milder voice, and with less bitter words, he conjured his companion to pause on the threshold of this fresh crime. For crime, indeed, was contemplated. Jasper Rivers knew full well that his aid had been asked in a scheme for embezzling Mr. Denison's property! But his words of entreaty and remonstrance fell on the still night air without touching the heart of the other. The chuckling laugh was repeated more than once; and ere they parted—as they did with scarcely the form of friendly intercourse—poor Jasper again was doomed to hear the taunt and reproach which drew their venom from a recollection of the past.

That past shall be briefly told, for we have no desire to keep the reader in the same ignorance as that which preserved poor Lizzy's peace. We will not attempt to extenuate error, but even a judge may listen to the story of temptation while he rebukes the criminal before him.

At the time when poverty pressed hard upon them—at the hour when Lizzy expected the pains and joys of motherhood—hiding herself from the world as if her pride were her shame,

Jasper was carelessly requested by one of his former companions to take charge of a certain box which would be reclaimed in the course of a few weeks. He acceded without one suspicious thought. A day or two afterwards George Harris, who though unconscious of Jasper's marriage, or of the present calls upon his purse, yet knew from many circumstances that he sorely wanted money, offered to *lend* him ten pounds. A boon so kindly and opportunely tendered was gratefully accepted. In a few hours the money melted from his grasp, as money always melts in the home of penury, to take some better form. It had passed into the shape of comforts so much required by Lizzy in her present state, that it would have been hard to say which one necessity *could* have taught them to do without, when a stray word aroused the whole train of suspicion, and Jasper Rivers found himself the unconscious dupe of thieves—the unwilling receiver and retainer of stolen goods. This was the fact, from which his conscience shrank, disguised as the truth was by vainest sophistries of the embezzled property being “perquisites, odds and ends, what every one appropriated.” But if this trial came at the hour when want's temptations were the keenest, it was also at the time when his wife's wrongs from the hands of her step-father were fresh in his recollection, and hard in their pressure, and they added a sophistry stronger than all the rest, when, like an evil voice, they murmured at his heart, “they are *her* rights, lend yourself to the rough sort of justice which is in your power; do not turn upon him who has befriended you to serve and right your cruel enemy.” Rivers touched not the stolen goods, but he preserved the secret.

In due time the box was given up, and the whole affair passed off with a fatal security that emboldened the plunderers to *enter on a system* of fraud towards their employer. Rivers

had never again, until the present occasion, been solicited to help them, and now it was a quarrel with one who had been accustomed to share the spoils that led to his assistance being required. We have shown that his refusal was prompt and decisive.

The ten pounds had been returned to the lender long ago, for Rivers had felt doubly guilty while under the ban of that obligation, and had debarred himself from every indulgence until it was discharged. But there was a sad and degrading secret which he kept from his wife, and which always associated a painful recollection with the birth of little Ellen.

CHAPTER VI.

"I have a worthy friend—a thriving merchant,
A keen, sharp-sighted veteran, who carved
With his own hands, his road to Fortune's heights;
And yet withal an honest, liberal soul.
And one who loves his fellows. I will plead
Your cause with him."—WESTLAND MARSTON.

LIZZY and her husband loitered over a late breakfast the following morning, and again thought how delightful a little leisure would be if they had but the certainty of finding employment in time to prevent its inconvenient consequences arriving.

"It was very ridiculous of George Harris to lead you out at such a time of night, only to take a stroll," said Lizzy, and the reader will perceive the subterfuge of which her husband had been guilty; "but I am glad, dear Jasper, that he did not tempt you again to smoke. Well, with all our cares, I feel what a blessing it is to have a husband who has no bad habits, and who has never done a thing in his life of which I am ashamed."

As she spoke she was busy preparing little Ellen's breakfast, and did not look up from the table:—had she done so she would have seen a mingled look of sadness and of affection on Jasper's face. He had not the heart to sadden her with a recital of the one error so prominent in his own mind.

"I shall go into the City," said he, after a slight pause, "almost immediately, and see what is to be done among the houses there."

"And I shall first of all write to Miriam," said Lizzy, "and

tell her exactly what has happened. We are quite sure of her affectionate sympathy, and almost as certain that her clear and quick understanding will suggest something in the way of excellent advice."

Lizzy did not say what else she intended doing; but as soon as the letter was written, she dressed for walking, and left home, taking it in her hand to post by the way. By this time it was mid-day, an hour when she had most rarely been elsewhere than in a close room or behind the counter. So different was the aspect of London streets, from that to which she was accustomed in her early walk, that she felt almost as if suddenly placed in some other city. The stir of business just beginning, the throng of vehicles of all descriptions, the hurry and bustle by which she was surrounded, might at another time have bewildered her senses; but now her faculties were strung to that pitch of excitement which deadens us a good deal to the influence of surrounding circumstances.

Not that it was any great or wonderful enterprise on which she had engaged; she was only about to offer her services to a milliner who had the reputation of conducting her establishment on principles of kindness and justice to her servants. Millinery was the department of business to which Lizzy had devoted her chief attention; she was competent to all she professed, but she felt that it was a bold scheme to address a perfect stranger, with the doubtful credentials she had to offer, and yet she had so firm a reliance on the power of truth—for she meant, if she could find in Mrs. Forster a willing listener, to relate the story of her life—that she was not devoid of hope. Had that hope been a little stronger she would have told her husband of her purpose; as it was she feared a disappointment for him, or else his discouraging words, the influence of which might weaken her own resolution.

Mrs. Forster's was not one of those tremendously-showy establishments, a few of which are to be noted at the west end of town; where servants in gorgeous liveries lead the way to splendid apartments, in which costly articles are arranged in the utmost profusion and in the most tempting manner; where the richest pile carpets await the press of the patroness's feet, and gilded mirrors reflect her form in every direction: and where, perhaps, the wives and daughters of wealthy men may sometimes conjecture that they pay for this lavish luxury in exorbitant prices; but then the taste of the articles procured here is so perfect, and the judgment displayed in adapting the "becoming" so great, that it is worth while to pay a little extra!

Dear countrywomen, believe me, these advantages *are* to be gained—though, I grant, in fewer instances than should be—where the forfeit paid for them is something less than the health, mind, life, soul, of your fellow-creatures. Your fellow-women! made by the great Creator in all things like you; with the frame that is frailer, and the sensibilities that are more acute, than those of man. And yet *he* reaches the point of resistance half way on the bitter course of excessive toil, and demands a remedy, while she so often *endures* till death itself brings a cure!

Do you ever picture—ye, who for healthful exercise roam abroad, it may be in the biting frost, but well protected by costly furs, and softest wool, and richest velvet—do you ever picture the half-warmed, not half-ventilated chamber, where those sisters

" Work—work—work,
Till the eyes are heavy and dim ; "

where the once graceful form is slowly bent to an incurable stoop; where the cheek pales, and the face grows wan, and the *agile fingers* seem to have acquired the body's chief vitality;

where toil begins before the dawn, and lasts till after midnight; where the food is coarse, and the raiment insufficient, and where Disease feasts like a vampire among his victims?

Do you ever picture—ye who in the glowing summer saunter in shady groves, perfumed with nature's sweets, or seek at will the health-giving breezes of the sea—do you ever picture that same low-roofed chamber, so close and crowded that the atmosphere would strike you as something fetid, were you to enter from the fresh air; where still the agile fingers move rapidly, as they call into being the tasteful garments so light and airy, so suitable for the season, and which are to lend new glories to the happy, the healthy, and the beautiful?

Mrs. Forster's abode was not one of these gilded sepulchres, but a good substantial house, in a leading thoroughfare. Lizzy knocked gently, and asked, in a tremulous voice, if Mrs. Forster were at home?

"Yes," the servant answered, "but at that moment engaged; if the lady would give her name, and meanwhile walk into the parlour, no doubt she would see her in a few minutes."

"Mrs. Rivers is my name," said Lizzy, "but Mrs. Forster does not know me."

"This way," said the servant, civilly, and leading her across the hall.

Lizzy had not long to look about her; but before the mistress of the house entered, she had just time to observe that the most exquisite cleanliness and beautiful order prevailed in the room. Mrs. Forster was a woman of about forty years of age, of medium height, and very simply dressed; she had no pretensions to be called even good-looking, and yet the expression of her countenance was so genial, and her voice had so gentle a tone—not, by the way, that affected low pitch which breathes hypocrisy with every word—that old and young, rich and poor yielded, as if by a spell, to her influence. Lizzy

stammered forth, more abruptly than she had intended, her first words of self-introduction, and the purport of her visit; and they were so feelingly received, that she found herself in tears before she could proceed.

"My poor girl," said Mrs. Forster, kindly, "it makes my heart bleed to tell you that I have not a vacancy for you. There is scarcely a day that I have not applications of this sort, and sympathy is a poor substitute for bread."

"Sympathy is most precious from you," sobbed Lizzy, "so honoured, so respected as you are."

"Am I so?" said Mrs. Forster. "It is a great happiness, then, to feel that my endeavours to bring about a better system are not quite in vain. But I have daughters of my own, and cannot help feeling for you all; and if I could, there would be no merit. I have not had any sacrifice to make—my business has increased rather than diminished, since my eyes were opened to the enormities which prevailed in so many houses, and even to some extent from the force of habit in my own."

"Oh, madam!" urged Lizzy, "if you would only give me hope, that if a vacancy should occur, you would employ me. I have told you the cause of my husband and myself being thus suddenly thrown out of employment; but Messrs. Trong dare not urge a word against our conduct, the three years we have been with them. I fearlessly refer you to them for my qualifications, and my general character."

"Let me take your address," said Mrs. Forster, after a pause, "something may occur,—I do not like to pledge myself,—but it is a busy season,—perhaps——." She paused, and turned towards a servant whose entrance had interrupted her.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Warder, from Liverpool, has called for the box if it is ready. He has a cab at the door, and is on his way to the Euston Square terminus."

"Is he too hurried to get out?" asked the lady.

"Oh, no, ma'am," replied the servant, "he is up stairs, he told me there was no hurry for a few minutes."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Forster to Lizzy, "I will come back to you presently," and she left the room almost as she spoke.

"Mr. Warder from Liverpool!" murmured Lizzy, and a crowd of early recollections rushed to her mind, till her heart beat quickly, and her brain almost reeled. There was no time for reflection,—it was one of those moments of life which if not seized and made our servants, are lost to us for ever. Happily she had a pencil about her, and a letter from which she could tear a few inches of fair paper, and with trembling fingers she wrote as follows:—

"Madam,

"Your goodness will forgive my boldness. The name I heard announced as you left me was that of a friend of my childhood,—a friend of my dead mother's. In pity ask him to speak to you a word of favour for one whom I cannot think he has forgotten. He will not know me as Eliza Rivers, but he may remember little Lizzy Dean. Oh, pray, dear madam, forgive me, I have not time to think if I am taking an unwarrantable liberty."

This done she rang the bell, and wondering at her own daring, entreated the servant to give the "piece of paper"—she could not call it a note—to Mrs. Forster immediately. And then she sat down, holding her hand to her side, as if to still the beating of her heart, but motionless as a statue. The past—the present—and a vague future crowded together on her mind,—all things taking unreal proportions, and straining her mind to a painful point of endurance. To cold and phlegmatic natures, or to those whose course of life has been smooth and successful, the occasion may seem too trifling to

produce so much emotion ; but I can assure such people that they are incompetent to measure,—and therefore should take upon faith,—the keen suffering of sensitive natures, who have been worn to the quick by accumulated trials. And it was, after all, an important question to Lizzy, whether she had obtained by her proceeding two powerful friends for herself and husband, or lost the one which had seemed nearly gained !

It was a question quickly solved—though in her state of mind three minutes seemed a long space of time. Not more, however, had elapsed, when the sound of hurried steps upon the staircase reached her—and then the parlour door was thrown open. Mrs. Forster and Mr. Warder entered : but the gentleman led the way, and before Lizzy knew how it had all come about, she found herself taken in his arms, and her cheek kissed as if by a father !

“ I am delighted at this meeting,” exclaimed Mr. Warder, in a tone of gladness. “ I was wishing extremely to find you out, and—forgive the frankness of an old friend—to learn all the particulars of your estrangement from Mr. Denison and his family.”

“ Oh, sir, if you will but listen to the history of my life,” said Lizzy, “ how gladly shall I tell it you. It was my marriage that offended my step-father, or, perhaps, I should say my wish to marry Jasper Rivers ; and now because yesterday our marriage was disclosed in a house where married servants are not permitted, we are both cast adrift. But there are so many details you should know—and yet there is not time,” and she glanced as she spoke at a time-piece which stood near, “ for I heard just now that you had only a few minutes to spare.”

Mr. Warder looked at his watch ; paused a moment, and then said, “ I shall delay my journey until to-morrow ; my wife

does not expect me sooner; I had thought by returning to-day to give her an agreeable surprise—that is all—and when I tell her whom I have met, she will say I did quite right to stay. Now tell me where you are living, because you must let me come and drink tea with you this evening.”

“Oh, Mr. Warder, how good you are,” sobbed Lizzy, fairly overcome by her feelings, and sinking into a chair for support. And now Mrs. Forster stole quietly out of the room, and returned in less than a minute with a glass of wine in her hand. The tears stood in her own eyes, as she raised the glass to Lizzy’s lips, and then removing her bonnet she laid the throbbing head upon her shoulder.

“My poor soul!” she exclaimed, “how much you must have suffered, to be so overcome by kindness.”

For answer, Lizzy kissed the hand that was round her neck.

“Ah! Mrs. Forster,” exclaimed Matthew Warder, “it is only they who have seen as much of life as you and I have; who have been under authority themselves, and in turn have controlled others, who can tell what the real struggle for existence is. They alone know how hardness lacerates the heart, till old wounds bleed even at the touch of a healing hand; they can tell, too, what a vital thing is the loss or gain of employment to those dependent on it. But cheer up,” he added, addressing Lizzy; “we shall put everything to rights I have little doubt. And as my old friend, Mrs. Forster, could not have the heart to disoblige me, I must stipulate that she very soon finds you something to do here; and then I shall know you are in good hands, and have my mind at ease about you.”

“But I beg you, sir, to understand,” said the lady, gaily, “that if I do as you recommend, you are by no means to lay all the credit to the account of your influence. I have

daughters of my own, and always think of them when a young woman wants a friend. I had half made up my mind to engage Mrs. Rivers before you came into the house."

"And now you have done so entirely," exclaimed Mr. Warder, laughing. "Oh, I am quite content to forego the credit, so that I gain my end. Well, I have made up my mind: first, to set Mrs. Rivers down at her own door to-day, as she does not seem to me very fit to walk home: secondly, for her to call on you to-morrow to arrange preliminaries; and, thirdly, that you are going to behave in the whole affair with the kindness and justice that always distinguish your conduct."

"I certainly owe you a low courtesy for that pretty speech," said Mrs. Forster; "and will only say that I will try to deserve it."

She parted from Lizzy more like an old friend than the acquaintance of an hour. Mr. Warder's offer to take Lizzy home, was gladly accepted; and though the ride was not of many minutes' duration, it probably afforded her an opportunity of giving him a few more particulars of the situation of herself and her husband. It would indeed seem to have been the case; for as we shall see, he did not waste the time which intervened between this morning rencounter and six o'clock, when, punctual to his engagement, he presented himself at the homely abode of Jasper Rivers and his wife.

CHAPTER VII.

" True, the penal fires are out ;
True, the rack in rust has lain—
But the secret burning Doubt
And the pangs of Thought remain :
True, the mind of Man is free—
Free to speak and write at will,
But a power you cannot see
Still can plague, and waste, and kill."

R. MONCKTON MILNER.

LIZZY reached home an hour or two before her husband ; there was time for her to remove the evidences of her recent emotion before they met ; time for her to calm her bewildered thoughts ; and last not least, in her opinion, time for her to make some little preparation for the expected guest. She knew that Mr. Warder had been highly esteemed by her mother ; that she counted him among her few stedfast friends in the early days of her second marriage ; she had heard it said that she herself had been a " pet " of his, but her actual recollections of him were dim and indistinct, the most prominent, certainly, being his presentation of a large doll to her one New Year's Day. Casually, from time to time, his name had been mentioned in her hearing as that of a prosperous and much-respected man ; this was all her knowledge of his present position, and she wondered at her own temerity in addressing him.

Jasper came home at last, looking pale and tired ; he inquired if dinner was ready, but added, that he was more faint than hungry. Disappointment was written in every line

of his countenance ; and it expressed the truth, for he had been utterly unsuccessful.

The reader knows how different a story Lizzy had to tell ; but so new and strange did everything seem to his ear, that she really found it difficult to make her husband comprehend how events had come about. The pith of the matter seemed to him to be that Mrs. Forster had promised to engage her, and that one of the most influential employers in Liverpool was coming to drink tea with them that evening ! And yet he felt that such a piece of condescension could surely only exist in imagination, and Jasper wondered for a moment if he were in Dreamland or not. Then as the conviction dawned upon him, that they had indeed won a powerful friend, Lizzy had the happiness of seeing his countenance light up—that dear face, whose every lineament she knew, and whose lightest expression she could read ; and as he caught her to his heart, and called her the “ best little wife in the world,” she felt how rich they were in a love that mutual sorrows had tried, but which, though shadowed sometimes, as even deep love may be, by the demon of worldly care, still existed in all its fervour !

Mr. Warder had that happy gracious manner of putting people at their ease, which can only accompany a thoroughly kind heart. A manner that must be spontaneous, and never can be taught, adapting itself to the accidents of the moment, and therefore defying all rules. Thus Mr. Warder contrived, while relating to Jasper some circumstance of his own career, to say, “ When I was in your situation of life ; ” and so with exquisite delicacy to remove the appearance of condescension.

The trio were gathered round the tea-table ; and little Ellen, too, was there, dressed in a neat white frock, and seated in her high chair, so “ good,” as her mother said more than once. Mr. Warder was deeply touched by the appearance of the *child* ; and more so when he heard the sufferings of her little

life related. The large eyes, so full of precocious expression, and the wan face and thin arms saddened him to look at; and he felt there was an invisible Presence beside them who would soon claim her for his own! But if he saw the shadow of the sorrow that was coming, it only turned his heart the more kindly towards them on whom it would fall.

An hour passed quickly away, and by this time the guest had communicated his chance meeting with Mr. Denison, and the visit to Portland Lodge, which had resulted therefrom, and conversing with Jasper Rivers on many subjects connected with business, had formed a favourable and just opinion of him.

"I have taken the liberty," said Mr. Warder, "of requesting my son to meet me here this evening. No doubt you know the house in which I have placed him, Messrs. Lorrimer and Co.'s, and I took an opportunity this afternoon of mentioning to them that you wanted a situation. I am sure you will not blame me for withholding my direct recommendation until I had seen you."

"I am at a loss, sir, for words to thank you," said Jasper, and he spoke the truth.

"Stay, there is very little done yet," replied Mr. Warder; "but I am not without hope that a letter of introduction, which I will now give you, may have more weight. Meanwhile I shall be glad to introduce Frank to you—he has very few friends in London; and if you and your wife will admit him now and then, I assure you I shall be quite pleased. I dare say he will be here very shortly; for I need hardly say Messrs. Lorrimer close early, though in the very heart of a neighbourhood notorious for the opposite system. I would not for tens of thousands have placed him in the demoralising atmosphere which I know must exist in hundreds of houses in London."

"I know the house well," said Rivers; "their premises join Trong's at the back, and often and often have I envied

their inmates when the gas has been turned off, and the shutters closed, three or four hours before we dared hope for rest."

While the words were on his lips there was a knock at the door; but it was not Frank Warder who was announced. The visitor was not a stranger: though she had but seldom been to the house, she remembered her way up stairs very well. She paused, however, before the room door was open, on learning from the servant that Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were not alone; Lizzy heard the buzz of voices, hastened to admit as she expected young Warder, but found herself clasped in the arms of Miriam Lowe!

"Dearest Miriam!" exclaimed Lizzy, "how kind of you to come; but how were you able to do so?"

"I will tell you all presently," said Miriam; "but I hear you have company."

"Yes; the kindest and best of friends is here—a gentleman who remembers you, a gentleman whom you saw only on Sunday, Mr. Warder!"

At her friend's entreaty, Miriam entered the room; Jasper welcomed her with gladness, and Mr. Warder shook hands with her cordially. She bent down to kiss little Ellen, but the child shrank timidly towards her mother's side, and not till she was told it was "god-mamma" did she pout up her lips to meet Miriam's. God-mamma herself, as her holidays, and consequently her visits, were few and far between, was but dimly remembered by the child; but the *idea* of god-mamma was a much more real thing. This was to her infant mind the example of everything that was good and clever; so glowingly had she always been described by Lizzy; and now one could fancy little Ellen was not disappointed in her presence, with so earnest and pleased an expression were the large eyes *fixed upon* Miriam's face.

Questions were put to the new comer almost faster than she could answer them ; and from the whole manner of Jasper and Lizzy she was induced to speak in Mr. Warder's presence without reserve.

"Your note reached me," she said, "about five o'clock. How it came previously into Mrs. Denison's hands I do not exactly know. Perhaps she was in the lobby on her way to dress for dinner when the postman rang, and so came to take it from the footman. She brought it herself into the school-room, and told me as she gave it into my hand that she knew the writing. I did not break the seal, believing she would leave the room in a minute or two, but instead of doing so she sat down, saying, 'Why don't you read your letter? I want to know what'"—Miriam paused a moment, and then used the safe pronoun "she" instead of the noun "hussy" which had really been used, "'I want to know what she says.' I need not tell you, my dear Lizzy, how hurt and indignant I felt, but I endeavoured not to speak from the warm impulse of the moment. I laid my hand on the letter, and said, 'Before I break the seal, madam, I must beg you to understand that I cannot promise to show you what is beneath it; though in all probability I may be able to do so.' She nodded her head; but she had seated herself with her back to the window, and I did not observe that her silence was the silence of rage."

At this stage of Miriam's narrative, Mr. Warder moved uneasily on his chair—there was nothing of which he was more intolerant than meanness and vulgarity of soul. Jasper exclaimed with bitterness, "Just like her," and Lizzy raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Tears had flowed thence so often that day, that they stood ready for the slightest summons. Miriam continued her recital.

"Directly I had read your note, I thought there was an opportunity before me that was not to be lost. I felt glad that

Mrs. Denison had brought it to me, and that her desire to know its contents had rendered my task so easy. I offered her the letter, but she waved it back, and told me to read it to her."

"Declined touching it,—" exclaimed Jasper; and he guessed pretty nearly the truth.

"I need not tell you, Lizzy dear, that after reading your note aloud to Mrs. Denison, I strove to propitiate her favour; nor am I aware that I left anything which could be urged for you unsaid. She, however, evaded giving an answer to any of my requests, but asked me what I wished to do in the affair? I replied, to go and see you, if she would permit me, this evening. She replied, 'By all means; I shall not prevent you, and rose to leave the room. It was now that I perceived she was in a passion of anger—that vindictive sort of rage that exists under a tolerably calm exterior."

"I know it of old," sighed Lizzy.

"In about half an hour," continued Miriam, "Mr. Denison came home. In a few minutes afterwards rather a rude message was sent to me desiring the letter for his perusal. I sent it, and in ten minutes more received a second message by the housemaid, together with the few pounds which were owing me—my salary up to to-day."

"The message—I can guess it—poor Miriam!" exclaimed Lizzy, pressing her hand.

"Perhaps you can. It was to bid me leave the house—not to pay you a visit—but for ever. Yet do not distress yourselves, my dear friends," continued Miriam, "perhaps it is all for the best—for reasons which I will give you some other time. I had resolved not to stay much longer; and as I was about taking my annual holiday of a week, I have ascertained, on my way hither, that the friend with whom I was to have spent it can receive me to-night. In preparation for this occa-

sion, my wardrobe was, in a great measure, packed ; so that I have suffered scarcely even an inconvenience. My only regret was parting with the children. They are capable—all children are capable—of so much improvement, by judicious management."

Miriam had scarcely finished her recital, when the expected visitor was announced. Frank Warder was a good-looking, intelligent, young man of three or four-and-twenty, a little like his father in many respects, and entertaining so true a respect and veneration for him, that his mind insensibly acquired a similar tone. He had taken so many of his father's opinions originally upon faith, and clung to them with the tenacity of those who hug a prejudice, until, happily, the unbuilt bridge of his own reasoning powers developed with time, and he had the satisfaction of feeling his whole mind echo in approval of them,—that, perhaps, he had scarcely a more solid belief than that his dear father was always right. It was pleasant to see them together ; their bond of union seemed the very ideal of the paternal and filial relation made real ; such perfect trust and confidence mingled in Mr. Warder's affection for his son ; and such true and tender respect was given in return,—a bearing altogether opposite to that blind obedience and chilling deference which seemed expected from children a generation or two back,—and which must have frozen real, warm, impulsive household love to the core, nipped it down to the roots, and left the only chance of such affections ever blossoming to consist in removal to another hearth. It would not be altogether unprofitable to examine how many extinguished, or fast-fading, social evils owed their origin to domestic tyranny.

Most people have observed how often the most pleasant meetings come about in quite an unexpected manner ; and so it proved that evening in the humble abode of Jasper and Lizzy Rivers. Their hearts were full of deep gratitude for the
Toil and Trial.

better lot which seemed opening before them ; Mr. Warder was really happy to have been the instrument of serving them, and, naturally cheerful, was now positively lively—full of conversation and amusing anecdotes, while Frank and Miriam seemed strangely enough to have fallen into a little separate chat, like that of old friends rather than acquaintances of the hour. It was not at all of the nature of discussion, for they seemed to have very similar views of most things ; and now that Miriam's anxiety on her friend's account was set at rest, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of congenial society—so rare a happiness to her—and, talking with Frank chiefly of the books she dearly loved, her speech grew eloquent and her face animated. But the friend whose guest she was about to be was expecting her, and she could not stay later than nine o'clock ; it was the most natural thing in the world for Frank to offer himself as an escort, a civility not to be refused : and being a warm summer evening, he slackened his walk to something almost slower than a lady's pace. He would have liked the walk to be three miles instead of one.

Mr. Warder took the opportunity of being alone with the young couple to press a little present on Lizzy, begging her to accept it for "auld lang syne,"—a present of money,—and surely it is not true that such gifts, among right-minded people, are difficult to offer or to receive. It may be, that the occasions when they are really appropriate are few, and that, as a rule, it is kinder and wiser to spend money than to give it,—but, perhaps, the very rareness of those fit times makes it the more imperative that they should not be lost.

Mr. Warder had, also, time to write the promised letter of introduction before Frank returned, and soon after he did so the father and son took leave together. On their way to Frank's new home, he was somewhat more silent than usual, *though Mr. Warder spoke of their new acquaintances.*

"Do you know, Frank," he said, "Miss Lowe puts me very much in mind of your mother,—she is very like what your mother was twenty years ago; cannot you fancy so?"

"I do not see the likeness, my dear father, though she is a charming girl," replied Frank; "but I am sure you are pleased with her, or you would not have paid her so high a compliment."

"Yes, it is a compliment; not that she is as handsome as your mother was, not that the face is really like, but there is something in her manner and in the tone of her voice that is similar."

Frank could hardly have told how it was that he felt positively elated at hearing his father praise Miriam Lowe.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ And joy to him who o’er his task
Remembers toil is Nature’s plan ;
Who working thinks—
And never sinks
His independence as a man.

Who only asks for humblest wealth,
Enough for competence and health ;
And leisure when his work is done,
To read his book
By chimney nook,
Or stroll at setting of the sun.

Who toils as every man should toil
For fair reward, erect and free :
These are the men—
The best of men—

These are the men we mean to be !”

CHARLES MACKAY.

It would occupy many chapters of dull and tedious detail, were I, as with the pencil of a Dutch painter, to describe minutely every shifting scene of the months following Jasper’s abrupt dismissal by his employers—which was itself one of those happy events that, though clouded for a moment in the guise of misfortune, but shroud the way to happier days, just as the mist of a summer’s morning may obscure the path we seek most gladly to follow. Rather than labour over weary details, I would strive to paint a broad-outline picture for the reader’s heart to fill up by the magic of its own promptings.

Through Mr. Warder’s introduction Jasper Rivers was received into Messrs. Lorrimer’s establishment, where his past experience and business habits soon raised him to a *situation* of considerable trust, and proportionally increased

emolument. No longer was his body worn by over-toil, or his temper irritated by that perpetual tension of the nerves which must arise from too long-continued monotonous employment; occupation just mental enough to occasion anxiety, but no way satisfactory to the higher faculties. No longer were his spirits depressed by the hopelessness of his lot, or his mind and character deteriorated by close contact with men his inferiors, because they had still further succumbed to the evil influences by which all were surrounded. No longer did he find himself addressed with a haughty insolence, that he would have been ashamed to use to the most menial drudge—for the coin of courtesy never circulated between his former tyrants and their slaves. It seemed as if the higher qualities of his soul, which must in reality have won Lizzy's love by their sympathy with her own nature, were now apparent to the world in general; and some of the people who had formerly thought him commonplace, now began to say how "wonderfully he was improved;" and others, that "you required to know him well;" and that "they were so well matched—a delightful couple."

The managing partner at Messrs. Lorrimer's was a man of enlarged mind; but at the same time thoroughly practical and business-like in his views. With leisure he might himself have become a theorist; as it was, he contented himself—and all honour be unto him—with acting on the hints thrown out so constantly in the present day by the great men, who may be called our social philosophers. With sympathetic quickness he always caught a fine idea, or a grand truth, however the stream of prejudice might set against, and threaten to swamp it. Happily he had but little passed the golden age of forty; and with few exceptions, it is to men of his years and character, too young to have been greatly indurated by the force of early evil habits of thought and action, that we are chiefly indebted for ameliorative measures. There is something

inexpressibly painful in contemplating a man too old to learn—a mind too time-hardened to expand—a soul afflicted with a mental cataract, that obscures its vision, and keeps back the light of truth ; and for which there is seldom a couching. No wonder that towards such characters, there is rarely shown the graceful homage of respect from youth to age ; it cannot be shown sincerely by one

“ The heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of Time,”

who feels he is there, and holds his privilege to be closely yoked with duty. Pity and forbearance are all he can give to the white hairs his soul refuses to honour. What a difference from the reverence which gushes from our younger hearts, when we hear the eloquent speech, or read the inspired words of the few who have kept their hearts green to the patriarch's years ; on whose experience the great truths of modern science and philosophy fall like seed on a rich soil, to bring forth fruit abundantly—those rarely dowered men and women who never grow old, who retain side by side with their garnered knowledge the wise simplicity of childhood, and the hopeful, trustful spirit of youth. Verily, when we meet with them, we are ready to kiss the hem of their garments ; to stand and serve uncovered ; to pay all Spartan homage ; but never tell us that age alone is venerable, when it clutches its money-bags with a miser's grasp ; when for its unenjoying plenty it wears down the hope, and the health, and the loveliness of youth ; when it stunts or wastes the energies of vigorous manhood to serve its own selfish ends ; and stands in the way to clog the wheel it should have helped onwards, and stay the progress of a world which is steadily moving towards happier days than the chronicles of history have yet shown us. It is not profane to say so confidently ; the Great Ruler of all things for ever *works by second causes*, and surely of these the mind of man *is chief*.

In showing the reverse of the medal, and hinting at what Mr. Lorrimer was *not*, I have striven to render more pointed what he *was*. The most perfect order and regularity prevailed in the household, but no petty tyranny had place there. The limited hours of business caused business to be brisk while it was going on, and at the same time concentrated the energies of the assistants to do what they had to do thoroughly. If, however, by any accident there was a lull of business, if the spacious shop seemed only half occupied, if the indescribable hum of many voices, and the rustle of moving figures and measured silks had ebbed away to faint distinguishable sounds, then instead of permitting the assistants to seem busy, as is the common custom, by winding and unwinding, folding and unfolding, packing and unpacking, Mr. Lorrimer would recommend half-a-dozen at a time to take a health-giving walk in the fresh air, or it might be, grant the remainder of the day as a holiday to spend as they liked. It was not only that they returned to their duties from such recreation with renewed strength and energy, but they brought home gratitude, and, it would not be too strong a word to use, affection, towards their employers. They worked really for love, as well as for money; they were jealous of the high credit of the house, knowing as they did how much it stood above its fellows in all that affected them. To have wronged or disgraced it would have seemed a parricidal crime. In the evening there were rational recreations for those who dwelt in the house—a good library and a piano, the latter a great pleasure to two youths, who had taught themselves to play very tolerably. Mr. and Mrs. Lorrimer and their young family resided under the same roof, and were constantly mixing among the young people. Sometimes the assistants clubbed together to engage instructive lecturers; sometimes they read aloud; sometimes they started subjects for debate; and not unfrequently an idler, a little

inclined to cigars and dissipation, had been shamed out of evil habits, and gently led into good ones. The young women of the establishment were admitted to all the advantages of the reading-room. Several of them were married; their husbands of course engaged like themselves, and they usually sat at needlework while their husbands and friends were reading or entering upon some instructive conversation around them. Jasper Rivers had his own dear home, to which he returned betimes, finding Lizzy also released from her day's employment at Mrs. Forster's; but it was no very uncommon thing, if they walked out, to drop in for half an hour at the Lorrimers', and see what was going on up-stairs. What a contrast did the spacious cheerful reading-room afford to the chamber at Mr. Denison's, familiarly called the "den," or its fellow so near to them at Messrs. Trong's!

There is another incident to note. Miriam Lowe was now governess to Mrs. Forster's children, two little girls between nine and twelve years old. If the busy, prosperous, kind-hearted milliner was generous and considerate towards her work-people, there need be little doubt of Miriam's position in her family. Esteem and respect were hers, as well as food and stipend. One day in the week Mrs. Forster loved to spend exclusively with her children; and, therefore, on Sunday, Miriam was free, and very commonly passed it with Lizzy. Alas! there was a reason, beyond that of simple regard, why she sought to be with her friend as much as possible, and to offer in the sorrow which was threatening her, at least the consolation of sympathy. Poor little Ellen was sinking fast, she was beyond the reach of medicine—doctors shook their heads and said it was only a question of time. The early canker of disease had spread insidiously, and though the child suffered but little pain, her strength wasted until she could *not stand*. And still her precocious intelligence remained

undimmed, endearing her still more to her parents. Piteous would have been Lizzy's situation, had she been in the employ of a less thoughtful and kind employer. If she gave up her engagement, how could she supply the additional wants of the little sufferer? And yet to be away from her bed-side the long long day was a trial nearly as hard to bear. Mrs. Forster divined the conflict that must arise in her heart, and suggested that Lizzy should work for her at her own home.

It was in this manner the winter crept on—the short days and the long fire-side evenings. Often and often—and almost always on a Sunday, Frank Warder joined their little circle, for he had attached himself very warmly to Jasper Rivers, and it was soon suspected that one other he so often met there proved a yet more powerful attraction. The manner of his father's introduction of him to Jasper gave more than sanction to the acquaintance, while his opportunities of daily intercourse inclined him to look up to Rivers as an adviser in all business matters, which his few years' seniority and experience entitled him to be.

I will not say that Frank Warder was ignorant of the nature of his growing regard for Miriam Lowe; for love is generally most self-conscious, however much it may be the fashion among novelists to describe their heroes and heroines as "awakening from a dream," and in perfect ignorance of the passion that is life itself to them; but his admiration was too deep to betray itself very often in words, and his respect too great for him to address her very familiarly. It was quite natural that he should very often make personal inquiries concerning the dying child; and though he frequently met Miriam in the sick chamber, and shook hands with her across little Ellen's cot, he would not have acknowledged himself guilty of the subterfuge of professing sympathy for the parents' sorrow without experiencing it. Nevertheless he knew himself to be disappointed when Miriam was not there!

CHAPTER IX.

"Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
Made tuneable with every sweetest vow."—KEATS.

"Was it not well to speak?"

————— It could not but be well.
The slow sweet hours that bring us all things good,
The slow sad hours that bring us all things ill,
And all good things from evil, brought the night
In which we sat together and alone."

* * * * *

TENNYSON.

It was a chilly evening out of doors, but a cheerful blaze shed comfort through the room which we last beheld in the bright summer time. The poor child had fallen into a disturbed sleep in the little cot which was generally carried from room to room; the mother had put away her work, and Jasper had just come in with the prescribed medicines. They were both sorrowful, not yet resigned to the blow which was impending; seeming, indeed, rather to cling more fondly day by day to their living treasure. Sometimes hope cheated them for awhile; but reason told them a sterner truth.

Yet, however much Lizzy had to engross her thoughts and feelings, she was never forgetful of what she believed to be a duty. With a woman's quickness, she had divined that an attachment was growing up between Frank Warder and Miriam Lowe, and much as there was in such a circumstance to give her pleasure, she shrank from encouraging their meeting, unless assured of Mr. Warder's sanction to their intimacy.

"Pray, Jasper, decide what we ought to do," said Lizzy,

after an allusion had been made, not for the first time, to the subject ; " to write to Mr. Warder would seem terribly meddling and impertinent ; and yet to allow his son frequent opportunities of forming an attachment which might displease him, looks to me something like ingratitude."

" Could you not speak to Miriam," suggested Jasper, " and ascertain if there be really any engagement between them ?"

" I am certain there is not," returned Lizzy ; " she would not have concealed such an event from me ; and how can I tell her, so good, so generous, so clever as she is, that we fear she has inspired an attachment, and fear she should be despised by her lover's family ? Indeed, dear Jasper, I cannot do it."

" You are right," said her husband ; and after a pause he continued, " I will speak to Frank Warder myself ; he knows our obligations to his father, and his good sense will teach him to sympathise with our feelings. If Mr. Warder but knew her worth as we do, I should have little fear of his objecting to her want of fortune."

Even as Jasper Rivers spoke, Frank Warder entered the house to make his inquiry after the little invalid, and Lizzy took an early opportunity of leaving the room, trusting that Jasper would fulfil his promise without further delay. He did so.

A deep flush, and then a smile mounted to Frank Warder's ingenuous countenance.

" Forgive me if I have caused you pain," he exclaimed, and holding out his hand to Rivers. " I ought to have anticipated something of this sort ; I ought to have remembered that you could not know my father as I do—that you could not know intuitively how matters are always managed in our family."

" Am I to guess," exclaimed Rivers joyfully, " that you do not dread your parents' opposition—indeed, she is worthy of you, if they only knew her merit."

" Not only I do not dread their opposition, but I have my

father's sanction to offer my addresses to Miriam Lowe, if I dare hope to render them acceptable. With such a father as mine, a father towards whom I never in my whole life felt one moment's fear, I could not have played a deceitful part. As soon as I became aware of my affection, as soon as I had examined my own heart, to be sure that it was no passing fancy, I wrote to him, telling him the truth, and begging for the happiness of his sanction to my endeavours to win Miriam's love. A few days passed before I received an answer, and I have reason to believe they were employed in making inquiries about her; for my father's connections are so widely spread that it is very rarely indeed he fails in finding a link in society when he wants one. If I am right in this conjecture, the result must have been very satisfactory; for a fortnight ago I received a short but affectionate letter, in which he told me he approved of my choice, hinted at the fine character which was likely to have been formed by the trials to which Miriam has been subjected, and rejoiced that my fancy had not been caught by some thoughtless and ignorant girl, such as abound in the circles of the worldly wealthy. In short, my dear friend, I am only waiting an opportunity formally to ask dear Miriam to be mine. I will not be guilty of the affectation of saying that I am without hope—she is too noble, too candid, to have played for one moment the coquette; and even your admonishing words are to me a confirmation of all I most wish to believe."

Overcome by his feelings, Frank Warder leaned his face in his hands, and as youth's sweetest vision rose before him, I am not sure that glad tears were not in his eyes. When Lizzy came back, the joyful tidings were repeated to her, and be sure she did not dull his hopes. Amid all her own mother-anguish, her heart responded warmly and truly to the happiness which *seemed opening for her friend*; and the admiration she felt for;

Mr. Warder's right-mindedness seemed to strengthen her own character.

The opportunity for which Frank had waited, or which, it might be, he contrived to make, soon arrived, and Miriam heard from his lips the avowal which her own heart had already whispered. How happy were they now to meet at their friend's abode, words can but indifferently tell, though it was but a foreshadowing of the yet happier days to come, when closer communion, and yet dearer sympathy, should bind them still more near. That "courtship" is,—or, at any rate, ought to be—the "happiest" portion of life, belongs to the rusty file of false old proverbs, which have done their work of mischief in the world already abundantly, if they never again confirm a wrong, or shake yet more a trembling belief in right.

CHAPTER X.

"Had all your quarters been as safely kept
As that whereof I had the government,
We had not been thus shamefully surpris'd."—SHAKESPEARE.

"Not one turn more round the square?" said Frank Warder somewhat beseechingly, and holding very tight the hand which rested on his arm.

"No, Frank," replied Miriam smiling, but very firmly, "not one step more out of our direct road to my home. Mrs. Forster gives me until eleven o'clock, but I always like to be home a few minutes before. She is so kind,—so indulgent, that I would not trespass on her kindness for the world."

"You are quite right, dearest," returned young Warder, and I am to blame for urging you to be later,—but are you sure our brisk walk has warmed you this bitter frosty night?"

"Quite sure; and I am almost as sure that I shall find a bright little fire in my room, when I get in."

"I do love Mrs. Forster for petting you," said Frank, "though to be sure your being happy with her deprives me of an excuse for hurrying our marriage. Another six months!—what an immense time to wait; and then all the fuss of settling about a business before it can take place."

"But what a kind father you have," exclaimed Miriam, "to settle you in business, as you call it, without your encountering the struggles to which so many are exposed."

"I have, Miriam, the best of parents, and I am grateful for

it. Do you know, the sorrows you have experienced—for you must have been miserable with that horrible, ignorant, vulgar Mrs. Denison,—your trials, all endear you to me, and give me a reverence for a character that has borne them so nobly. Now, are you quite sure that there will be a fire in your bed-room?"

"Almost certain—the last evening I spent with Mrs. Rivers was not so cold as to-night, and I found one on my return. Mrs. Forster is so *thoughtful*; that is the beauty of her character; and when I thank her for any kindness, she generally says, 'I have daughters of my own, and I always think how I should wish them to be treated.' She often reminds me of Mrs. Denison, because her words contrast so forcibly with that lady's favourite phrase, 'the duty she owed to her children.' But here we are; do not knock too loud. Good night, Frank; God bless you!"

Frank lingered till the door had closed upon her, then turned away, his heart brimming with happiness. All his thoughts were with Miriam; but he walked fast mechanically to resist the cold of a biting wind. Nevertheless, the clock struck eleven long before he reached Messrs. Lorrimer's. He found the reading-room, to which he made his way, almost deserted; and the two or three stragglers who had lingered beyond the usual hour of retiring, took their departure soon after his entrance. Frank was not in the mood to sleep—he experienced that wide-awake sensation which is so common after the pleasurable excitement of society; and an evening in the society of Miriam Lowe, at the home of their mutual friends, was by far the most delightful and real enjoyment life had yet brought him. He took up a newspaper; but every paragraph he attempted to read seemed devoid of interest; and he found that though his eyes took in the words and sentences, they conveyed only a confused meaning to his brain.

He smiled to himself as he became conscious of the pre-occupation of his mind, and turning the comfortable chair, into which he had thrown himself, round to the fire, he gave himself up to the indulgence of—a lover's reverie.

Long he sat thus—his head upon his hand—and his happy face glowing at first in the light of the bright embers, at which he gazed, connecting by the mysterious power of association the fanciful shapes and lurid caverns of the burning coals with the voice, the words, the looks, the gesture, or the pressure of the hand, which his memory never wearied of recalling. Long he sat, for the fairy shapes so lately glowing had now grown dim, and a slight shiver through his frame, together with the click of the cooling cinders, had reminded him that it must be growing very late, when a sudden noise still more completely aroused him from his dream.

It was a dull hammering sound, and evidently proceeded from the direction of the Trong's premises; the back of which immediately adjoined those occupied by the Messrs. Lorrimer, the two together cutting off—isolating—the corner houses, whose convenience had probably been entirely sacrificed for the commercial purposes of the two larger buildings. The noise increased—in a minute or two was followed by screams—and, at the instant that a sudden suffocating smell burst on the senses of Frank Warder, the terrible word "*Fire!*" was shrieked by a score of voices!

It awoke the whole household, but Frank had a great advantage over those who were thus fearfully aroused from heavy slumber. Already the bright flames darted from the back windows of Messrs. Trong's, their pointed tongues, directed by the dry wintry wind, sloped towards the rival house, till they almost seemed to lick its walls. Frank saw in an instant the imminence of the peril, but his presence of mind did *not desert him*. He leaped rather than stepped upstairs to

the sleeping chambers, taking care to close the door of every room on his way. On the first landing he met Mr. Lorrimer flying to the nursery, and his half-fainting wife refusing to stir until the children were safe. Meanwhile the din of voices, and the terror of fifty human beings drawn from their beds by the awful alarm of fire, must be borne in mind; nevertheless there was something in Frank's appearance, entirely dressed, as he was, and in his collected manner, which gave confidence to the rest, and his words were listened to by all.

"Dear Sir," he exclaimed to Mr. Lorrimer, "be calm, and there is no danger. You have not only good time to leave the house, but to save what valuables may be at hand. Let me take Mrs. Lorrimer safely to some house opposite,—there I see the dear children have each a protector,—and then we must see what can be done in the shop and warehouse. I'll be leader; who'll volunteer to follow me?"

"I—I—I," was shouted by so many that it seemed as if every one, not personally engaged in assisting the women and children, was eager to be of service.

"Think of life and limb before all things," exclaimed Mr. Lorrimer, but there was a depth of sadness in his tone even beyond that natural to the occasion.

"That consignment from Paris!" murmured Mrs. Lorrimer, as she gained the street, leaning heavily on Frank Warder's arm. "Our insurance will not half cover the property!"

"Let us hope for the best," said Frank, leaving her at a hospitable door already open to receive the fugitives, whence he made his way as quickly as possible through the crowd already gathered to the threatened premises.

Except the married men, and even they were returning, not one had left the house; all were eager saving the property of their employers, though acting at random, seizing whatever was nearest. There was not a hope that the house would be

spared; the frost had bound up the water-pipes, and every five minutes' delay in procuring water aggravated the fury of the flames.

"Listen to me a moment!" exclaimed Frank, as he re-entered the house, where a stifling sensation warned him of the approaching catastrophe, "who'll follow me to the inner warehouse, and snatch up the bales from Paris that came in yesterday? Who'll save the firm five thousand pounds for which they are not insured, and show that we are of different metal from the Trong's people, who are running away like frightened rats?"

"Ay, ay," they shouted, as if with one voice, "who's afraid,—we don't mind a singeing,—keep Mr. Lorrimer back,—make him go over the way to his wife,—tell him we'll save his shawls and the Lyons silks,—and that too before the smoke ruins them,—now for it, hurra!"—and with a rush they made their way up staircases and along passages, every step leading nearer to the lapping flames, the light of which almost blinded them. The inner warehouse was a room where the most valuable property was usually kept,—it abutted on the Trong's premises; and now the iron bars which protected the back windows were hotter than the hand could bear,—every pane of glass was broken,—and the paint on the window shutters was blistered. Dried in this manner by the heat, prepared as it were for the coming flames, it was a service of great danger to enter this part of the building. Had the fire caught it while Warder and his companions were there,—as it did three minutes after they left, bearing in their arms and on their shoulders the bales of precious merchandise,—it would have been a struggle of life and death to reach a place of safety again; with such wonderful rapidity did the flames leap from spot to spot, truly meriting the name of the "devouring element." The brave band were received with

shouts of applause by the crowd in the street, who made way for them to cross over. An English mob is pretty sure to recognise an act of heroism when they find it; and the daring exploits of "Lorrimer's young men" had reached their ears. Meanwhile the hospitable neighbour, who had opened his house to the fugitives and to the rescued property, had huddled on his ordinary apparel, and stood in his door-way, his hands in his pockets, keeping guard on the ingress and egress to and from his house, and moralising, from time to time, on the conduct of the "Trong's people" and "the Lorrimer's." The former had rushed away, as Frank said, like "rats," from the danger, giving no thought as to whom or what they left behind, blaming one another in loud and angry voices, and quarrelling and scuffling even at that awful moment. What a contrast to the braver party, who, so soon as their first good deed was accomplished, set themselves in an orderly manner to be of use in finding the water-pipes, and subsequently, under the direction of the Fire Brigade, in working the engines. There was no squabble among them, no dispute what was to be done, they acted as if with one common intelligence, because they were intelligent beings, whose faculties had been allowed to expand, and were ready for use at a moment's demand.

"Well, I declare," said the homely but excellent John-Bull neighbour, "they 're a fine set of fellows; and I shouldn't much wonder if my son William is right. He says that the out-of-the-way bits of knowledge the lads get now-a-days at the lecture halls, and from the cheap books they buy, are sure to come in use some time or another. Now to think of their shutting all the doors in their hurry, and stooping down, as I hear say, because there 's always air near the ground—the way too they 're working at this moment! Perhaps they 're all the better for the hydrisdaulics and the filophysics, and all the *ists* and *ics* they have studied at odd times, which never were heard of when I was a boy."

Perhaps the good tradesman was right. Perhaps the young men were all the more helpful, and the more self-possessed, for even a smattering knowledge of hydraulics and physical science. In contradiction to the old adage, we would hint that a "little knowledge" may be far less "dangerous" than none at all.

It was after every inmate of the Lorrimers' had withdrawn from the premises; after the "consignment from Paris" had been placed out of danger, that Jasper Rivers arrived on the spot. He and Lizzy had retired to rest immediately after Miriam Lowe and Frank Warder left them; but it was no unusual thing for the watchful parents to rise more than once in the night to comfort or assist the suffering child; and on one of these occasions the glare of a "great fire" flashed across the window. A moment's thought and observation convinced him that it proceeded from the direction of his employer's premises; and his natural impulse was of course to rush thither. The buzz of the crowd revealed to him pretty clearly what had been done, and he envied his fellow assistants their opportunity of proving their gratitude and zeal. A scene, however, far more terrible than any which had preceded it, was about to appal the spectators. A rumour arose that a man was still on the Trong's premises, or rather in the upper storey of one of the houses forming the corner already mentioned. Every one wondered why he could not escape as the other occupants of that house had done, except those who knew that the floor in which he was confined was cut off from the other part of the house to which it belonged by a walled-up door, having been let to the Messrs. Trong, and a communication opened with their premises. Jasper, who well remembered the arrangements of the house, comprehended the whole tragedy in a moment. He knew that the "shop-walker"—he who had been for three years a tyrant to Jasper, and to whom at last *he chiefly owed his dismissal*—slept on that floor, and he was

able to recognise the miserable creature, as he stood at the window wringing his hands, his countenance distorted by the anguish of his almost hopeless condition, and looking down on the sea of up-turned anxious faces, glaring in the red light of the flames, and all alike expressive of terrible commiseration. The height from the street was tremendous, and many feet above the tallest of the fire-escapes. Jasper saw that the one faint chance for his escape rested in the door of communication with the now deserted house being burst open, and that this could only be done by main force. The brave men of the Fire Brigade were ready—in the fulfilment of their noble duty—to run all risks; but their ignorance of the localities of the different premises was a great hindrance to their usefulness. Rivers knew this, and helping to wrench an iron bar from an area grating, to use as a weapon, he made his way up the stairs of the deserted house, which was already to his senses like a heated oven. The flames were threatening to clasp it every moment; for the experienced firemen dared not bring the full force of their engines to play, while life had yet to be saved, knowing that the suffocating volumes of smoke, which would instantly arise, might be yet more fatal. What a moment of breathless suspense ensued! It lasted till in the hush which prevailed, Jasper's ponderous blows on the fastened door could be distinctly heard above the roaring of the fire. Then the figure from the window turned away, raised its arms with a gesture of thanksgiving, and was seen no more, till, amid deafening shouts, the two, wounded and bleeding, emerged from the house. They had leaped more than one flight of stairs, round which fire and smoke were already writhing!

Jasper's former tyrant was the less injured of the two; though his face was cut and he was otherwise bruised. Unconscious who was the hero of the exploit, young Warder had made his way to the spot, and recognised his friend with

pride and joy. Jasper had sprained his wrist violently, and hurt his knee in forcing the door; he begged Warder to find a cab and send him home.

"I go with you," said Frank, "we have both, I think, done our parts to-night. And I must console Mrs. Rivers for having to nurse you, by telling her what, perhaps, your own modesty might hide."

"Was it Rivers that broke open the door?" said the rescued tyrant, in trembling tones, and evidently not having hitherto recognised his deliverer.

"It was," said Frank Warder. "Good night. You see there are plenty of kind souls ready to assist you now. Look, Jasper," he continued, addressing his friend, "how the engines are playing! Lean on me. Come along! See, every one makes way for you."

CHAPTER XI.

"Yes, mother! gird thy loins once more,
Go forth alone, nor weep the dead;
Thy prayers were answered:—Life's dark shore
Was far too gloomy for her tread.—
Life's hopes too poor: Death-sealed when born,
She left thee on the wings of morn!"—E. A. H. O.

THREE weeks have passed away, seeming a long—long day of suffering to Lizzy and her husband. Jasper is still confined to the sofa, the injuries he received by the fire still requiring medical attendance. Though it is mid-day the room is darkened, and Lizzy sits plying her needle by candle-light. She is not now engaged in the manufacture of rich and gay dresses for the adornment of the wealthy and the beautiful; her hands are shaping a black garment for her own wearing, and every now and then they are raised to dash away the tears that flow silently and at intervals.

And in the next chamber there lies a small grey coffin, that contains the fragile remains of their much-loved child. Often and often in the day is the lid pushed aside, that the mother may gaze, clinging while she may to the shadow—the cold, lifeless wreck—of her first-born, of that dear intelligent creature, the pressure of whose lips still seemed glowing on her cheek, and whose thin, wasted arms she yet dreamed were pressed round her neck. It was no parent's fantasy that made them both think that clay image "angelic;" the primrose clothes hid the shrivelled limbs, and the face wore an expression of seraphic innocence. To complete the picture, two roses and violets were placed in the little hands; for

Miriam had brought her young pupils on a visit of condolence, and this floral offering had been theirs, purchased with their own pocket-money, even at the dead of winter.

Sitting with the bereaved parents, there is just now a third person, Messrs. Trong's great man, the "shop-walker," whose life Jasper had saved. He has been assiduous in his inquiries; and there is reason to believe that his hard nature was really touched by the generous devotion of one whom he had formerly used harshly. It was quite out of his power to show his gratitude, otherwise than by words; but in this sort of payment he was profuse; and as the disorganised state of the business, from the total destruction of the premises in which it had been carried on, gave him many errands in the same direction as Jasper's residence, he never failed on these occasions to "drop in" and ascertain how the invalid was going on.

"If you feel so much gratitude for an act of common humanity," said Jasper, in reply to some of his fervent protestations, "repay the obligation by forswearing the evil system to which you have been a party. You have influence with your employers, exert it in the good cause. Now, when the whole neighbourhood, and all the circles connected with the trade, are ringing with the contrast so recently afforded by the conduct of the two houses, not to dwell too on what you know, that the origin of the calamity is attributed to two or three drowsy, worn-out young men, falling asleep from sheer exhaustion, without putting out their candle;—now, when the first difficult steps are already passed, when the Association for this great social reform is so securely established, that its objects must, sooner or later, be gained,—now is the easy opportunity to swell its ranks, and to push forward the movement, so that the good time may come 'soon,' not 'late;' so that the thousands, who, in the one case, are still doomed to premature death and misery, may be spared—spared not only to life, but

saved from the moral and spiritual corruption, which is the worst kind of death. I speak to you from my heart ; I speak to you as a victim ! Sorrows and trials, whose bitterness my own soul alone can fathom—the miserable life, and, humanly speaking, the loss at last of our poor infant—I owe to this vicious system ; which makes of employers and employed an unchristian and barbaric community, instead of fellow human beings, helpmates working together, proudly as they should do, forming, by the grand union of capital and labour, the main springs of this mighty kingdom : instead of this beautiful combination, it makes of Englishmen only a band of tyrants and slaves, of despots and rebels, with the vices inherent to their condition, fostered and full-blown in the hot-bed of selfishness, cunning, and knavery ; a band held together only by the rotten tie of momentary self-interest, and whose footing is like that of the desert — sand. A blast from any quarter of the heavens may snap the tie unsecured by principle, and bury the individual in the shifting soil beneath him."

"You have such a strange, strong way of putting things !" ejaculated Jasper's auditor.

"Have I ? I am glad of it. I did not think that eloquence was my gift ; if I have arrested your attention, I implore you to ponder on my words."

"Well," returned the other ; "indeed I will think of what you say ; but you know ——"

"Mr. Warder," interrupted the servant, opening the door, and ushering in the visitor who had followed close on her steps.

The "shop-walker" hastened his departure, but not until he had been astonished by seeing Mr. Warder, whom he knew perfectly well by sight and by repute, shake hands kindly with Lizzy, and, approaching the sofa, hold out his hand to Jasper, exclaiming, in a friendly manner :

"I beg of you don't rise for me, or I shall go away directly."

It is hardly necessary to say, that Mr. Warder was fully cognisant of every thing which had transpired ; for always in frequent communication with his son, letters had passed between them for the last two or three weeks almost daily. The catastrophe of the fire had disturbed his plans for Frank. While the premises of Messrs. Lorrimer were being re-built, they required fewer hands at their temporary place of business than heretofore, and Mr. Warder disliked the idea of his son displacing any young man who was dependent on his exertions for bread ; besides which, under present circumstances, his opportunities of seeing how a first-rate London business was conducted could not be very good. In fact, he felt strongly disposed to establish him in business on his own account without much further delay. It is true it was a season of mercantile depression, but at these times those who have money are able to make with it the most advantageous investments ; and Mr. Warder had sufficient capital to enable him to wait for the turn of business. In connection with this plan he had a project which he now came to communicate to Rivers. He had previously spent nearly an hour with Mr. Lorrimer, during which interview he had made many minute inquiries about the conduct and capabilities of Jasper Rivers ; the answers had been without exception confirmatory of his own high opinion of him.

Not abruptly did Mr. Warder enter on business topics. His kind heart prompted most sincere expressions of condolence to the bereaved parents ; he knew that, to the sorrowing, sympathy is far more precious than wondrously wise and weighty arguments to prove that their sorrow should be less, and that their consolations are greater than are apparent : otherwise he might have found some common text, from which to read a very common homily of so-called consolation for the mortal release of the little sufferer. But he also knew that it was weak and wicked to morbidly indulge in a grief that was irremediable ;

and that the kindest and gentlest plan was to lead the mourners on to contemplate a Future, instead of dwelling on the Past. Therefore, at length, he communicated his intention to Jasper Rivers, adding :

"And now my proposal is, that you should become Frank's chief assistant. I believe we shall not quarrel about terms—for yours will be an office of trust and responsibility, and I would not permit the holder of such a one to be poorly paid."

"Oh, Sir!" exclaimed Jasper, the rising tears choking his voice, "I have no words to tell you—how can I say how much I feel your goodness? Lizzy, speak—say something for me;" and fairly overcome by many crowding emotions, and perhaps unnerved by recent illness, he burst into a torrent of weeping.

But Lizzy was no better able than he to shape into set phrase the gratitude which brimmed their hearts. Already blinding tears had caused her to lay aside her work, and what she did say was wild and incoherent. Mr. Warder took her hand, and pressing it kindly, he said—

"I understand all you would say. Believe me, I am well repaid for this step, by the belief that your future lot will be free from the trials and sufferings which have so darkened the past. Of course, you will reside in the house, having your own apartments. And some department you will probably feel inclined to fill, but what it had better be must, I think, be arranged between you and Miriam. I need hardly say, that she will have nothing to do with the business, and for this reason you will be most valuable. There—there, say no more. The benefit will be as much, or more, Frank's than yours; for he will enjoy the services of one whose integrity I consider has been tried by the bitterest of temptations, and remained unshaken through all."

This last assertion fell on Jasper's ear like an appeal to his soul for confirmation of Mr. Warder's words. And how did

his soul answer it? One deep wound of conscience, that never yet had healed, welled bitterly forth; but of its anguish was born a noble resolution. Noble, and wise, with "the wisdom that is greater than prudence." As if the whole future of his possible life were crowded into a picture before him, he saw that if he permitted that assertion to remain uncontradicted, peace of mind never could be his, even though fortune showered her choicest gifts upon him. No—at all hazards, at all risks, in all defiance of the worldling's false and crooked policy, he would be true to the higher impulse of his nature. His countenance became deathly pale, as he raised himself on the sofa, but his voice was quite calm, as he said—

"What, Mr. Warder, if I were to tell you that my integrity has not always stood the bitter test of temptation?" He did not dare to look at Lizzy as he spoke, but he felt that her eyes were on him—he felt what was the truth—that such words must freeze her to the stillness of a statue. Mr. Warder started, and said,

"I should not believe it, save on your own confession."

"Then, I confess!" and Jasper poured out the story with which the reader is already familiar.

Mr. Warder heard him without interruption to the end, and, perhaps, with more emotion than he betrayed. But Lizzy, though still mute, alided from her chair and knelt beside the sofa; and then, regardless of Mr. Warder's presence, leaned her head on her husband's shoulder, and sought his encircling arm, as if thus alone she could certify her sympathy and her forgiveness; and thus alone renew his courage, and give him strength to complete the recital. There was a pause at length, but Lizzy did not move—she only murmured,

"My Jasper, what unknown wretchedness have you suffered!"

"*You have done well and wisely,*" said Mr. Warder, "in

making this confession to me. The noble resolution which prompted it, and the deep repentance of your fault, which it proves, only increase my confidence in you for the future. I may echo your dear wife's words, and exclaim, 'What unknown wretchedness have you suffered!' But your secret will lose half its bitterness now that it is divulged to me—and not even to Frank shall I betray it. You will learn—and in the light of brighter prospects soon learn—to believe that your heart-repentance has been accepted as an atonement, and that you have a right to be happy once more."

"Oh," exclaimed Lizzy, raising her tearful eyes at last to Mr. Warder's face. "Oh, that there were more Christians, and fewer Pharisees in the world!"

"Be composed—be comforted," continued Mr. Warder, "and let us not refer to this painful episode again; though some information I may give you presently may possibly once more bring it to your mind. Have you heard anything of Mr. Denison's affairs lately?"

"I heard a rumour," said Jasper, "a few days since, that a heavy bill of his had been dishonoured;—but such a statement is difficult to believe—his resources seemed so vast only three years ago."

"Perhaps they were so then; but fortunate speculators commonly grow imprudent. Besides this, in every business, the more widely extended it is the more imperative it becomes that Integrity should be its main spring. Without this one cementing principle the wheels will never work together for any length of time. However, whatever may be the causes of his failure, I only know the fact, that he will be gazetted as a bankrupt in a day or two,—that he purposes henceforth living on a small annuity, which in prosperous days he settled on Mrs. Denison—and that it is most probable I shall engage his premises for Frank. There is one circumstance I must

add : he attributes his involvements in a great measure to a frightful system of embezzlement which has been carried on for years by six or eight of his assistants, who at this moment are being examined at Bow Street. The rigid investigation of his affairs by his creditors brought the whole scheme to light."

"My Jasper—my husband!" exclaimed Lizzy, once more sinking her head beside him, "Thank God—thank God for all His mercies!"

"Amen," said Jasper solemnly. Mr. Warder was visibly affected,—he rose and took up his hat.

"Be comforted, my dear young friends," he exclaimed; "I understand all that is passing in your hearts, and I honour you for your feelings. Henceforth try to live in the future rather than the past. I will leave you now to be the best comforter each to the other.—God bless you both!"

He pressed Jasper's hand kindly and warmly as he spoke; then turning to Lizzy he touched her cheek with just the same fatherly kiss that he had imprinted there when first he met her under Mrs. Forster's roof.

CHAPTER XII.

"Deeds have their orbits, and but fly off to return; and Wrong has its settled Round, in which, wander as it may, it ever comes back to its source."

BAYLE BERNARD.

It is a February morning, and the snow lies close and deep, feeling crisp to the pedestrian's tread. The sun shines fitfully, glancing now and then in long, slanting beams, until the earth's white garment sparkles, as if studded with jewels, and then hiding behind the white hood of clouds that droops to the horizon. The trees bend their bare branches perceptibly beneath a weight of snow and icicles, and give but a Siberian shelter to their feathered rangers.

Down the broad and narrow pathways of one of our suburban cemeteries is borne a small coffin, followed by Jasper Rivers, leaning heavily on the arm of his friend, Frank Warder, for with difficulty he had left the sofa to follow his child to the grave. No pomp and pageantry have paraded its last journey on earth; its cradle was rocked by poverty and suffering; and its grave is haunted by the recollection that its fate was the result of an unchristian and a callous system.

A pleasant spot had been chosen for Ellen's last resting-place, where early flowers would bloom in Spring, and be the first heralds of the earth's coming wealth. Where green boughs would wave in the summer breeze, and the golden tints of autumn linger the longest. In the distance lay the Mighty City,—the centre of the world's commerce,—the emporium of

all that is great in literature and science,—there it lay like a still panorama, yet prompting the recollection of its wealth and its poverty; its luxury and its suffering; its learning and its ignorance. Not within its precincts must that little coffin rest, for Jasper Rivers was not one to be guilty of the Wickedness of adding so much as the light dust it contained to the festering heaps of the London church-yards. Those remnants of barbaric ignorance, which surely God uses as a scourge to whip intelligence into the dull of soul and sordid of heart; to show them, by the dread teaching of Death and Disease, that His laws shall be obeyed!

Another winter and another summer, and winter again have come and passed away, since all that remained of little Ellen was consigned to the fresh earth; but still the parents make frequent pilgrimages to her grave, and see that the flowers which are planted there are tended and trained. But they do not always weep over it now; for a dear consolation is theirs. A boy, moulded like an infant Hercules, stretches out his arms to Jasper, and knows with early intelligence the heart that loves him dearly; and already, with inarticulate speech, a sound comes forth from infant lips which Lizzy interprets as “mother.” It is not the same love as that which they lavished on their helpless, suffering first-born, there is so much joy, and glory, and pride in it. And yet it would be hard to say which love were the deeper and fuller. Already they build bright castles for the future of their little “Warder”—for he is named after their best friend. No dark recollection is connected with his birth, and Lizzy sometimes thinks she has a right to bury in Ellen’s grave the memory of her husband’s hour of weakness.

Frank Warder has already a flourishing business, thanks, he says, in a great measure, to Jasper’s valuable assistance.

Mr. Denison's house was almost entirely pulled down and rebuilt before young Warder occupied it. And he found an architect quite capable of combining in its re-erection extreme elegance with the most commodious arrangements for the household. Lizzy fulfils duties something analogous to those of Mrs. Chippin; but be sure the recollection of her own sufferings makes her thoughtful and considerate for the comforts of all those dependent on her arrangements. In every plan, for their increased convenience, she is warmly seconded by Miriam, who, now a happy wife, sheds a kind of moral sunshine around her. Shrewd people conjecture that some day Jasper will be a partner in the business; and far more improbable events have often come to pass.

We fear poor humanity, in the aggregate, has a malignant satisfaction in finding that evil-doers fail to prosper; and yet it may be that such an emotion is, after all, only the emanation of a just and honest indignation! Without allowing ourselves to pander to the passion of revenge, we will briefly mention that shortly after Mr. Denison's bankruptcy, Mr. George Harris, and six of his associates, were tried at the Old Bailey for embezzling property of their employer, and, subsequently, sent out of the country at the nation's expense, to labour in its service during that period of life in which honourable men seek to win fortune and renown!

As to Mr. Denison himself, his life is certainly not an enviable one. The slender income settled on his wife, he took the precaution of securing so very tightly, that every pound he possesses is received like an alms from her. She was not at all the woman to meet adverse fortune with heroism; and it is rumoured, that, instead of affording her husband consolation in his reverses, she heaps on him reproaches. To fly from her tongue he often leaves the small house in which they reside,

Toil and Trial.

and wanders for hours about the streets of London; dropping in, sometimes, on old acquaintances, and hinting that if any very eligible situation were to offer he might be tempted to take it; always, however, in these peregrinations, making a wide circuit rather than pass Frank Warder's dwelling—the scene of his own mercantile greatness, and—cruel tyranny!



THE IRON RULE.

A Domestic Story.

" Their bold little logic ever goes straight forward. No pompous absurdity would have maintained itself in this world, if mankind had not silenced the objections of the child. * * * Man who in his own case retreats from the barbarity of the middle ages, still maintains it towards the child."

MICHELET.

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THE IRON RULE.

CHAPTER I.

"The boy is father to the man."—WORDSWORTH.

"WHAT news? When are they coming? For I can see by the letter in your hand and by all your faces, that there is a budget to open!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell, addressing his wife more particularly, but looking round good-humouredly at the group who were assembled on the lawn, as usual, to await his return home; he descended from his stanhope as he spoke, and threw the reins to his groom.

"They will be here to-morrow," replied the lady; "I will tell you all about it when we get in doors."

"Ah! do," returned he; "for I am being smothered just now."

The smothering—with kisses—however, was an operation to which he was well accustomed, and it seemed not very disagreeable, if one might judge from the manner in which he received the eager caresses of his seven children. The eldest was a graceful, soft-eyed girl of fourteen, who now—on tiptoe—was tall enough to take her father's kiss without his stooping very much. This done, she seized one arm as hers by old established and original right, but interlaced her fingers round it, neverthe-

less, lest her possession should be disputed. The other hand was captured by two little daughters who could not reach his elbow; a boy still in frocks tried to cling round his waist, and succeeded in impeding his steps; while another took possession of the tail of his coat as better than nothing.

Walter, the eldest boy and second child, busied himself meanwhile in collecting a great coat and some parcels from the chaise. Once in the house, but not till then, "Papa" was released on paying the penalty of a second round of kisses.

Mr. Maxwell was a merchant of some opulence and consideration, but so chained to the oar of business that he could seldom leave the metropolis for more than a day or two at a time. Sometimes his family would spend a part of the summer or autumn at the sea-side, he coming to them occasionally; but the year to which I refer, his wife had preferred hiring a furnished house a few miles from town, where the children could revel in country air, and enjoy plenty of exercise, without undergoing even a temporary separation from their father.

The visitors, whose coming had been a matter of conversation and curiosity, were Mrs. Maxwell's sister and her husband and three children, not any of whom they had seen for many years.

"I wonder if we shall find them much altered," said Mrs. Maxwell to her husband, as they sat together alone, after the children had retired to rest.

"Ten years, my love, make a great change in all of us," he replied. "I dare say the Colonel and Mrs. Laurington will find that we look ten years older as well as themselves."

"I was not thinking of looks," she returned with a smile; "though I suppose we do grow very ancient, whether we perceive it ourselves or not. But somehow I cannot help fancying *from my sister's* correspondence, that she has become more

formal and precise than she used to be, and you know she was always a little that way inclined."

"You may remember I used to think her of a frigid disposition," said Mr. Maxwell.

"You did; but, my dear husband, you wronged her there. Believe me she always had a warm and affectionate heart. The peculiarity of her character seems to be that she is always warring against the demonstration of her own better impulses, as if she considered the display, or even the existence of any deep or kindly emotion, as something wrong."

"And Colonel Laurington!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell, interrogatively, "you must know him much better than I do?"

"I think that even he is not so imperturbable as he appears. We may be sure that a military life of all others is the one to form habits of exactness, a love of rigid unquestioning obedience, and a certain belief that whatever is, is right. And he, you know, is not only a soldier himself, but he comes of a soldier family."

"True; and I think this long residence in the north with old Sir James, is very likely to have strengthened all his prejudices."

"What I fear most," continued Mrs. Maxwell, "is for the poor children. You know Caroline and Walter have been in the habit of writing to their cousins, free, off-hand epistles, full of childish gossip; but I am afraid even they have felt a little chilled by the answers they have received, telling, as they do, from 'my dear cousin' to 'yours affectionately,' of ruled lines, new pens, and a carefully composed copy. Now though I think the writing an elegant, and above all legible hand, a most desirable accomplishment, it should be acquired at other times than when inditing a familiar epistle."

"You mean, my dear enthusiastic wife," said Mr. Maxwell, with a smile, "that as *you* could not pause to mend your pen

in the midst of an interesting paragraph, you do not think it natural that children should do so either?"

"I mean, my love, what we have both often said and agreed on, that children should be treated as human beings, not like distinct creatures, as is too commonly the case. Hence the want of sympathy with them, which is constantly, though imperceptibly, moulding and hardening many a high nature into the selfish worldly type of which the world is always complaining. I remember that I wrote to my sister some time ago, telling her that our plan had been to establish a perfect sympathy and confidence with our children, and that by this means we found it not difficult to direct their warmest feelings, and most generous impulses, emotions which we would be the last knowingly to crush."

"And what was her answer, my love?"

"I do not believe she understood me at all; for though she appeared to agree with the opinions I had expressed, I could perceive that she had no idea beyond that of establishing a system of perfect and blind obedience."

It was late the following day when the visitors arrived, and wearied with travelling, and little inclined for anything but repose, there was small opportunity for noticing the deportment of the children. Before twenty-four hours, however, had passed, Mrs. Maxwell felt sure that her opinion had been but too well founded.

The family breakfast-room was one of those cheerful, airy apartments which seem—at least to impressible people—to breathe of freedom and gaiety. The morning sun shone slantingly through the panes of a large bay window, where jasmine and honeysuckle seemed trying also to creep in; the open sash giving free ingress to the odour from more distant flowers which stole on the senses by fairy fitful visits. If the *truth must be owned*, children's toys very often "littered" one

corner of this room, and Magnus, a large and favourite greyhound, was always the first to enter, ready to say "good morning," with wagging tail, and to put his long cold nose into each familiar hand, not perhaps without "a keen sense of favours to come" in the shape of stray crusts and dainty fragments.

Mrs. Maxwell was at the tea-urn, preparing breakfast rather than waiting for her sister, when the door opened and the young Lauringtons entered. Never certainly had Walter and Caroline, who always breakfasted with their parents, beheld such courtesies and such a bow, as those which accompanied the formal morning salutation of their cousins. Walter, boy-like, was half inclined to laugh; but Caroline, intuitively following out her mother's endeavour to set them at their ease, began talking familiarly to Jane and Annie, although she extracted nothing but monosyllables in return. Sydney Laurington was almost overpowered by his uncle addressing two or three questions to him in a playful manner, and absolutely wonder-stricken at hearing Walter say, "Mamma, dear!" Such was the *tableau vivant* when Colonel and Mrs. Laurington entered the breakfast-room. The commonest observer must have remarked on the instant the effect of their presence, and before the morning meal was over, how much of fear mingled with the filial affection of their children.

Perhaps there is scarcely a more delicate subject to converse on with parents, than the treatment of their children; and yet it was a very natural theme for the long separated and really warmly attached sisters to choose. It might have been suggested by the amazement Mrs. Laurington could not conceal at beholding the unconstrained manner of the young folks about her, and the distress which was equally apparent on her sister's countenance, at witnessing what she considered the painful evidences of an IRON RULE!

"And you tell me, sister," said Mrs. Laurington, after they had become well aware of each other's opinions, "that you have never had reason to believe one of your children guilty of a falsehood, and that you make it a rule to avoid, if possible, a direct punishment for their trifling faults. Really it seems to me almost incredible, that with such a plan, and such excessive indulgence, you can get on at all."

"Such excessive indulgence!" exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell. "My dear Maria, I hardly know what you mean. I am sure we do not encourage in them a taste for any thing like enervating pleasures; but if it be a gratification, which to me it certainly is, to see any human being heartily enjoying the blessings of existence, how intensely is it felt when the objects are our own dear ones. I should really feel that I was robbing them of a right, did I debar them of one healthful pleasure or harmless recreation; always premising that these do not intrench upon their duties."

"But you know that when they grow up they must meet with trials and troubles."

"The very reason that we should spare them early sorrows as much as possible, and not dim the sunshine of hope and joy so soon as to leave them without even the memory of its glory. Every day that I live do I become more and more convinced of the vital importance of early impressions, and the cruelty of breaking down those hopeful energies which seem to me like a steed to carry their owner over the rough steeps of life."

"But I cannot see," returned Mrs. Laurington, "that a proper domestic government does anything of the kind."

"Nor I; but we differ, my dear sister, as to what it is which constitutes a 'proper' government. My husband and I believe that the law of kindness is the strongest law of all; and, moreover, it would be to us a source of misery did *we suspect that our children feared us*. Now, tell me, could

you love and fear the same object? Nay, do you not love only those with whom recollections of kindness and sympathy, or pleasant scenes and happy thoughts, are associated? And if we, children of a larger growth, are thus constituted, why should we think that children, in whom the germs of all human emotions are only less developed, should be different?"

"If they have no dread of punishment," exclaimed Mrs. Laurington, "there is no wonder they never tell you a falsehood!"

"Then by your own confession," said Mrs. Maxwell, with a smile, "I have the best of the argument."

CHAPTER II.

"There is a time between childhood and manhood when the character may be said to go through a process resembling fermentation, and the effects of spoiling and of simply erroneous treatment of various kinds are in a great measure thrown off. But take away from a child all the joyousness proper to his young years, and let him only know his parents, or others that have been around him, as tyrants, and the evil is irreparable. His life has wanted one of its proper elements."—ROBERT CHAMBERS.

THOUGH they may not be casuists, children are often more shrewd observers than we think them; and the young Lauringtons had been but a very few days the companions of their cousins, before the little people were all conscious of the difference of their lot. And this, though Mrs. Maxwell, from a feeling of delicacy to her sister, avoided marking it by any especial indulgence to her children, and Mrs. Laurington, no doubt, involuntarily relaxed a little of her discipline. But it astonished Walter and Caroline to find that their cousins dared not take a walk in the garden without asking permission; and it pained them very much to hear Annie reprimanded so severely that the tears stood in her blue eyes, for—losing her bonnet ribbon. True, as Mrs. Laurington said, this disaster could not have happened had she tied the strings properly, for which piece of negligence, by the way, Walter felt himself should be blamed; for he remembered hurrying her along with bonnet and tippet in hand to see his rabbits before they should have finished feeding. On their part, the poor, spirit-crushed Lauringtons could not analyse how or why it was; but they *certainly were amazed* at beholding the Maxwells, from Caroline

downwards, perfectly unsubdued and at their ease in the presence of their parents, to whom they talked as freely as to one another; putting their arms round Mrs. Maxwell's neck as she sat at work without invitation or solicitation, and prattling to both father and mother of the daily domestic incidents which made the events of their young lives. A pleasure could not be enjoyed till it was talked of and shared; there was always something to "tell papa," and happy was the child who, by meeting him in the hall or on the staircase on his return home, could give him the first intelligence of some glad tidings.

I do not imagine that the temporary residence of slaves in a free country, would make them more contented than before with their original condition, and on the principle that children are only men and women of a lesser growth, I suspect the youthful guests did stretch their chains a little, while visiting their relatives. An incident, however, very lamentable in its consequences, brought their visit to an abrupt termination. Should the relation of it appear puerile, the reader will, perhaps, pardon its introduction, when he finds that this event of childhood helped to mould the characters, and so influenced the conduct of men and women.

In rather a secluded part of the grounds a swing had been put up, and for the first few weeks of the family coming out of town, swinging had been the rage among the young people. But like many another "rage," it had been indulged in to satiety, and two or three days passed away before the little Maxwells, eager to find amusement for their cousins, thought of their sometime favourite recreation. When they did mention it, some other pastime was preferred; but before the end of the week, an invitation to the swing was again given.

"Don't you like swinging?" asked Walter.

"Oh! I like it very much," replied Sydney Laurington.

"Come along, then."

Alas! the temptation was very strong. A twelvemonth before, swinging had been prohibited as an unsafe amusement; and I am afraid that in his heart of hearts, Sydney Laurington felt very sure that, if he asked permission to indulge in it now, it would not be accorded. And yet, I suppose, he listened to a sort of sophistry, that whispered he was now a year older, and that this swing was much more firmly constructed than that of some young friends in the north, to which the prohibition had referred. Had he declared to his cousins the fiat which had gone forth, they would have earnestly dissuaded him from his attempt, instead of encouraging him. But all experience shows that terror ties the tongue, till with the slave secretiveness becomes a habit. Sydney jumped into the seat, probably not without trepidation; but apparently he yielded to the enjoyment of the exercise, and rivalled the more practised ones in the height to which he swung. Oh! the power of example! Annie, the youngest, and "flower" of the family, must swing too, and though none forgot the prohibition, all were silent on the subject. A pretty picture she would have made of careless childhood, as her bonnet fell back, and her rich, auburn curls seemed to float on the breeze, as she met it in her bird-like soaring. And for a wonder her cheek was rosy, with mirth as well as exercise. She, too, came safely once again to *terra firma*. And now, Jane Laurington must take her turn.

"One—two—three," and away she went; but scarcely was the swing in full play, when she cried—

"Stop, stop,—oh, stop me!" And in an endeavour, evidently prompted by some sudden and terrible fear, to reach the ground, she fell from a height of several feet. The little party gathered round her with eager inquiries if she were hurt?

"No—not much," answered the child; yet her pale cheeks and quivering lips belied her words; and though she made a

desperate effort to restrain the tears, they were wrung from her by the bodily agony of the moment.

"Oh, where are you hurt? Do come to mamma—she will tell us what is best to be done!" exclaimed Walter and two or three of the younger Maxwells almost in a breath. Caroline—the eldest—was not among them.

"No, no, no!" cried Jane, in an accent of terror that quite appalled her cousins: "don't tell her; I shall be punished for swinging—punished dreadfully."

"Punished when you are hurt!" exclaimed Walter, in astonishment.

"Oh, I am not hurt much—only my shoulder, and papa will be so cross, and look so angry; oh, don't tell. I should not have fallen but I was so fearful mamma would see me; for when I went high I saw over the trees, and mamma and aunt are walking at the other end of the garden."

"Don't tell," said Annie and Sydney beseechingly: "we shall all be punished if you do."

The young Maxwells were unused to concealment, and perhaps never had a secret before; yet is there much wonder that they promised silence on this occasion?

"I am very uneasy about Jane," said Mrs. Laurington to her sister that evening; "she looks dreadfully ill."

"So I have thought all day," replied Mrs. Maxwell, "but I did not like to alarm you; and she has scarcely eaten anything since breakfast. Does she complain?"

"I have not asked her if she is ill, for they are all very healthy, and I have a horror of making children fanciful."

"But, my dear sister, this is cruel if she be really ill,—and she looks ghastly."

"Jane," said the mother beckoning to her, "Come here. Are you not well?—is there anything the matter?"

"N-o, mamma, noth-ing," faltered the child, terrified into

a falsehood—though, perhaps, she was scarcely conscious it was one. She hardly knew if she ought to call the agony she was suffering, “illness.”

Mrs. Maxwell was by no means satisfied, although her sister appeared so. And yet, the idea of a child concealing an ailment was a thing too extraordinary for her to understand. “I think they all look very dull to-night,” she said a moment afterwards; “weary with play, I suppose, and ready for bed.”

On retiring to her dressing-room, Mrs. Maxwell’s maid accosted her by saying;

“If you please, ma’am, Miss Caroline wishes to speak to you; she begged me to ask you to see her, for she has something particular to say.”

Alarmed—she scarcely knew why—at so unusual a request, Mrs. Maxwell tripped quickly up the stairs which led to the children’s rooms, and entered the one appropriated to her eldest daughter.

“My darling, what is the matter?” said she, putting down her candle, and stooping over the bed to kiss the fair cheek that she found moist with tears.

“Oh, mamma, I am so glad you are come,” exclaimed Caroline, stretching out her arms to return the embrace: “I could not go to sleep without telling you about poor Jane. I am sure I *ought* to tell you, and Walter thinks so too; not perhaps that I should have known, had not her shoulder pained her so much that she could scarcely move it to get off her frock-sleeve.” And as distinctly as she had herself heard it, Caroline Maxwell related the adventure of the morning.

Mrs. Maxwell was pained beyond measure; and, moreover, felt herself placed in a very perplexing situation. All her sympathies went with the poor suffering child, and yet she felt that she had no right to conceal from her parents an accident *which evidently was serious*. She immediately consulted her

husband, and their joint sagacity led them, for the first thing, to visit the poor child, and examine with all tenderness the injured shoulder. It was to them something quite shocking to hear her beseech them "not to tell papa and mamma." They could not find any appearance of injury beyond a slight bruise; but the sufferer shrank from the slightest pressure of the part, or movement of the arm. They tried to comfort her with assurances that they would intercede to prevent punishment; and after arranging pillows to give her as much ease as possible, and opening the door which led into Caroline's room, kindling a night-lamp, and placing water within her reach, for the pain had caused a feverish thirst, they left her, resolving that as it was now past midnight, they would reserve the disclosure until morning, really not believing the case to be so imperative as to induce their sending for a medical man at such an hour; although, had it been daytime or evening, probably they would not have advised delay.

The scene of the disclosure may be passed over very briefly. So far were the hosts successful in their intercession, that Colonel and Mrs. Laurington promised not to inflict punishment on Jane, since she was already suffering for her disobedience; but Sydney and Annie were both forbidden all play for that day, and given long uninteresting lessons to learn. They knew, however, that this must be a commuted sentence, which they owed to the influence of others, it being so much slighter than they had had reason to anticipate.

Thanks to Caroline's gentle aid, the little sufferer had been able to "get on" her frock; and even now from the vague terror that was hanging over her, she tried to appear much better than she was. Medical attendance, however, had been sought, and a message received that Dr. D—— would call in an hour. It was during this interval that Mrs. Laurington, more probably from a habit of positive and frequent dictation,

than from actual harshness to her child, desired poor suffering Jane to practise a piece of music which still required some trouble and attention to be bestowed on it. The little girl seated herself at the piano; but it is quite true she played wretchedly ill, and out of time. Perhaps there are few things so trying to the nerves of those who are gifted with an ear for the harmony and rhythm of sweet sounds, as that unsteady playing which is to music what spelling the words of some eloquent passage is to reading. Nevertheless, it is a state of suffering which must be borne—as patiently as may be—by those who are about young learners. Jane Laurington, however, bade fair to become a fine musician, and seldom offended the ears of listeners even when “practising.” And this must have been why her present faulty playing especially drew down her mother’s censure.

“Mamma, it hurts my arm to play,” said the child in a choking voice, for the tears stood in her full dark eyes.

“You see the consequences of disobedience,” answered Mrs. Laurington, “but that is no reason you should play out of time; if you can play at all you can play in time. However, repeat that page, and properly, and then you may leave off.”

What folly to suppose that children are characterless—blank paper to be written on as the teacher pleases! Jane Laurington had naturally a warm and loving heart, and might have been easily and perfectly ruled through her affections. But the mind and feelings must have some support, and since she had not been allowed to twine her heart freely and tendril-like round those who should have been wise to guide, and strong to uphold her, severity had strengthened a certain power and element of character, which under one aspect might have been called self-control and self-reliance, under another, most unbecoming stubbornness. She had paused as her mother spoke.

"No reason she should play out of time!"—when every nerve quivered as she touched the keys: "the consequence of disobedience!"—when she knew her sufferings were the consequence of Terror! Oh, that Mrs. Laurington had known to what an attenuated thread she was drawing the once cable-like bond of filial affection! The pale cheek of the child flushed from mingled emotions, but with unchildlike resolution further tears were restrained, and those just starting seemed absorbed by the long silken lashes, instead of being permitted to roll down her cheek; and then the leaf was turned back and the page commenced perfectly—brilliantly.

"Sister, this is more than I can bear," said Mrs. Maxwell, rising to leave the room, and evidently much agitated, for she had divined in some measure the character of the girl, and knew that she was suffering intensely. At this moment about half the allotted page was executed, but before Mrs. Maxwell reached the door, she heard a faltering of the tones, and looking round, was just in time to catch the child, who fell from the music-stool, fainting from the keenness of her self-inflicted agony!

Now the mother bent over her, distracted and alarmed, shedding tears of unfeigned sorrow, and calling her child by endearing terms, which, had they been used in a happier hour, might have fanned the sinking flame of affection. But Jane Laurington heard them not; and when she recovered consciousness, it was Mrs. Maxwell's hand which she instinctively clasped, while she turned away her cheek from her mother's proffered kiss. It was in the midst of this distressing scene that Dr. D—— arrived, and on examining the injured shoulder, he at once pronounced that it was dislocated.

Bravely the little girl submitted to the necessary operation of replacing it in the socket—an operation rendered infinitely more painful than it would have been if performed soon after

the accident. Remedies were applied to reduce the inflammation, and with care and nursing, her sufferings were ameliorated even in a few hours. But they were not to be so readily forgotten; in fact the whole circumstances of the case were branded in her mind—a mind in advance of her years, and, it may be, made prematurely thoughtful by sorrow.

Those who feel themselves to be in the wrong are seldom the best tempered in an argument; and certainly in this instance Colonel and Mrs. Laurington could not but own that the Iron Rule had worked ill.

Nevertheless, they maintained the expediency of their system in general, and, it was very evident, entertained a dread of some contamination to their children from the free and merry-hearted flock of little Maxwells. A house was taken sooner than they had at first intended, and the visit to their relatives proportionately shortened. The families of course visited on friendly and affectionate terms; but it was tacitly understood that the parents never advised or interfered on the subject of education or domestic arrangements.

And so Time passed on. The Seasons melting into one another, and the years rolling rapidly by. But not so gently and imperceptibly does the Spring glide into Summer, as the Mind of the Young Child moulds into that of the Youth or Maiden:—We shall see.

CHAPTER III.

"Some feelings are to mortals given,
With less of earth in them than heaven :
And if there be a human tear
From passion's dross refined and clear,
A tear so limpid and so meek,
It would not stain an angel's cheek,
'Tis that which pious fathers shed
Upon a duteous daughter's head !"

WALTER SCOTT.

THE story-teller is, or ought to be, endowed with something like a magician's wand ; by the help of which, to carry the reader—in thought—from place to place with more rapidity than did the far-famed seven league boots ; and to sail with him "adown the gulf of time" with dream-like celerity. And yet after all, the charm lies less in the tale-teller's craft, than in the gentle courtesy of the reader, when he lends his imagination to follow the scenes which are painted.

Eight years have passed, and Walter and Caroline Maxwell and their cousins are no longer children ; but to chronicle the events of their young lives, however important they might be in moulding character, would be to describe many scenes as childish as those already imposed on the reader. It is better to take up the thread now, understanding that in the one family the Iron Rule has been rigidly observed, in the other, an unalterable law of kindness and gentleness. Unalterable, not capricious ; for, perhaps, the fitful petting and indulgence of weak-minded guardians, alternating with equally fitful and unreasonable severity, is even more cruelly mischievous in its results than habitual sternness. But the constant love, the

ready sympathy, the chiding, if chiding there be, which takes the shape of gentle counsel ; the free communion uncorrupted, unrestrained by selfish plans or secret wishes—oh, what a haven of joy and peace is the home where such blessings prevail ! Thrice happy are its denizens, even among many sorrows. They are the Good, too, for this heavenly training goes far to root out the evil from humanity. How should there be deceit or falsehood when there is no fear ? How could anger exist when there is no wrath to be encountered ? Why should any selfish plot or project be formed, when Justice never tilts her scale, except to favour Generosity ? And so the evil passions fade away even as a limb would shrink and wither if denied all exercise.

One important event, however, must be glanced at, and that was a large accession of property, to both families. Colonel Laurington had inherited nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his great-uncle, the Sir James before mentioned, and was now the representative in the House of Commons, of a certain county in which lay a very valuable estate. He had previously been a rich man, but it is very doubtful if his had been a plan by which his children were taught the duties as well as the privileges of wealth.

In the other family the case was very different. An ancestor of Mr. Maxwell's had left a will, by which a certain amount of property was to accumulate until the third generation, and then be apportioned among his great-grandchildren. His motive for making so unusual a testament was an honest one, for he desired to give time to certain possible claimants to make their demands ; claimants whom it was out of his power to discover. The specified time had now elapsed ; among the heirs were the young Maxwells ; and though there were so many of them, the *share* of each, independent of all control from their parents, *was above ten thousand pounds* ; received, of course, as they

respectively came of age. And at the period I again introduce them, both Walter and Caroline were in possession of their fortunes.

It was a winter's evening, but the scene was a well-curtained, warm-looking apartment, chiefly used as Mr. Maxwell's private room. A fire burnt cheerily in the grate, and a shaded lamp was on the table. Mr. Maxwell was seated in his arm-chair, but it was not an hour of study or recreation. Opposite to him, and leaning against the chimney-piece, stood a young man of about eight-and-twenty. Although he is to fill an interesting part in this history, I shall not describe him as "transcendently handsome,"—"fit for a sculptor's model,"—or by any other epithet which commonly introduces a "hero." Perhaps, however, he possessed some higher attributes than even these. He was good-looking, certainly, with an intelligence far above the general average beaming through his countenance; while a heart tempered to every fine impulse and generous emotion, completed that real character of which gentlemanlike manners, its natural consequence, is sometimes only the assumed sign. His face, just now, was expressive of many mingled feelings, though happiness shone through all, and was the triumphant one. He was a little nervous perhaps, and seemed to threaten the destruction of an ivory paper-knife which he had taken up, by the desperate manner in which he was bending it into a bow. But then his interview had been on a nervous subject. He had sought it to ask of her father the hand of Caroline Maxwell in marriage. I suppose he did not begin so very humbly, but now that his suit was sanctioned, he said:—

"I know, sir, your daughter might look much higher—that is—wealth—I know I am not worthy of her." (Paper-knife snapped at last.)

"I did not say so," replied Mr. Maxwell with a smile, in

which something very like a tear was blended (and he did take off his spectacles to wipe them) "believe me we have not been unobservant of your attentions; and had we disapproved of them, we should not have encouraged or even permitted your frequent visits. I rejoice that my child has not placed her affections unworthily, for I suppose you have made sure of her consent, before asking mine?"

"She has owned that she is not indifferent," he said, with much feeling; "but I cannot flatter myself that she loves me well enough to wed me without your approval."

"Phrase your meaning differently, my dear Morton," replied Mr. Maxwell; "you would say, 'she loves her parents too well to pain them by such an act.'"

"I believe you are right; and that the girl who would stealthily fly from a home like hers, is seldom worth taking from it. I know you will say it is very lover-like and very foolish; but I do wish she had not a fortune."

"A very foolish wish; whether it is a lover-like one I have not sufficient experience in lovers to tell."

"Briefs come in very fast," continued William Morton, "and with the few thousands I have ——"

"In short," interrupted Mr. Maxwell, with a good-humoured smile, "you have a reasonable expectation of becoming Lord Chancellor, and think it will be a pretty good match for her after all. Well, I think so too," he added, rising, and warmly pressing young Morton's hand; "and so do not misconstrue any signs of sorrow you may see at our parting with her. A parent must always feel acutely the separation of a child by marriage, but only a very selfish one would strive to prevent it. I thank Carry that she has not been very easy to please, and that she has gladdened our home so long. But don't let us men grow sentimental: there, now, shall I send her to you?"

William Morton had ample time to recover composure; for

many minutes elapsed before Caroline's fingers trembled on the door handle, which he flew to turn. During the time employed in the conference, a part of which has been narrated, the daughter had poured out the secret of her heart to her mother; and when Mr. Maxwell entered the drawing-room, he beheld them sitting hand in hand. Treading upon thick soft carpet, his step had not disturbed them, and he could not avoid hearing Caroline say, as she leaned her head upon her mother's shoulder:—

"And so, mamma, you do not think me wrong in never talking to you about him before! It was not want of confidence—you know that quite well; but how could I tell anybody—even you—that—that I liked him, when I did not know till to day—"

"My love, I understand it all," interrupted Mrs. Maxwell, stooping to kiss the flushed cheek beside her; "I would not have had you bold enough to talk of a love until you were certain that it existed."

Of all the mischief—and it is not a little—which old-fashioned romancists have done by their false pictures of life, perhaps the gravest and darkest is that which has arisen from the false painting of lovers' trials. Describing the making an unwise or unworthy choice as something very heroic, and danger, difficulty, and opposition, as lending so many additional delights to stolen interviews. No—such are *not* blissful meetings, whatever the Minerva-press school may say. It is when reason, and affection, kindred's sanction, and the world's approval, blend all into one "knot of happiness," that earth's highest meed is won. The door closed after Caroline entered the library—so let it be.

CHAPTER IV.

"Experience does take dreadfully high school-wages; but he teaches like no other."—CARLYLE.

ONLY a few hours have passed, and it is to a house in a neighbouring street that I would conduct the reader.

Colonel Laurington's was a princely mansion, exceeding in magnificence the happy home we have just left. But how vast the difference in that moral atmosphere which sheds happiness or discomfort around! If mirth did peep stealthily in at the door, it was admitted as a guest to be hid and silenced: surely a hearty unaffected laugh would have startled the very walls, used as they were to echo sententious phrases and sentences of command. And yet the Lauringtons loved their children:—ay, better than they themselves knew till the hour of trial came. Loved them, and devoted thought, time, energy, and fortune, to work out their advancement according to their own ideas of parental control, and of their children's happiness and prosperity. But it was an affection never to be demonstrated except on some great emergency; never to be displayed by trifling indulgences, fond words, or that just permittance of free-will which, in due proportion, it were wise to accord even to the very young—for those ever accustomed in all matters to lean for advice on the opinion of others, must either become most feeble characters, or gain their strength at last by some bitter ordeal of the stern teacher—experience.

How could their children guess at their affection? What is it to the beggar who is refused a halfpenny, that he who denies *him such a boon* carries a fifty-pound note about him?

It was some hours after midnight, within an hour or two of the November dawn, when Jane Laurington, warmly equipped as if for travelling, stepped lightly across a short corridor which led to her sister's bed-chamber. She opened the door gently, but in truth had she been heard, the noise would have attracted but slight attention, for Annie was suffering from a lingering illness, and her servant and her sister often came to her in the dead of the night if summoned by the knell of her wearying cough. One glance revealed that it was the chamber of an invalid. There were the shaded night-lamp, and the fire which showed it had been lately tended: the row of medicine bottles, which told how many remedies had been tried, and the small table, with the cooling drink and grapes, and *eau de Cologne* within reach. And marble tables, and ample mirrors, and damask hangings were there, and every little luxury that might assuage mortal suffering.

Jane Laurington listened for an instant, and was sure her sister slept; she then locked the door after her, her second impulse being to remove the bell-rope, placed on that sister's pillow, out of Annie's reach. Long and fixedly she gazed at that sleeping figure, till tears—tears which she had determined not to shed, stood in her eyes. There was a hectic flush upon Annie's cheek, yet this but little disguised the attenuation of her countenance; and her long fair hair, once so rich and beautiful, partaking as hair always does of constitutional debility, hung in lank and heavy ungraceful masses upon the pillow. No wonder that in the *malaise* of a restless night it had escaped from its confinement. One hand was seen, though half-shrouded by a ruffle of lace, which seemed itself scarcely more frail than those pale thin fingers, that from waking habit were even in sleep a little bent to retain on one of them a chased gold hoop, which otherwise would have dropped from its shrunk supporter. That ring! It was the sole memento

of an ill-placed and unhappy love, which had proved the evil, ruling destiny of her young life. The cough gave its warning note, and Annie Laurington was soon aroused from her fitful slumber.

"Dressed so!—and in the middle of the night—where are you going—or am I dreaming?" she murmured, raising herself upon the pillows, and stretching out her hand to her sister.

"Not dreaming, darling," replied the other, affectionately, "but you must promise to be calm or I cannot tell you—you may blame me—yet I am not sure you will."

"Ah!" exclaimed the invalid, and she spoke in a stronger voice than had been heard for many weeks, "I have guessed it all, you are flying from home with *him*, and would not trust your sister till the last moment lest she should betray you!"

"You wrong me, Annie. Had I thought you would betray me, I should not have been here even now. I am sure you would not, unless in some mood of depression from your illness, when the mind is unhinged, and is scarcely answerable for its own weaknesses. I am about to fly this house, no doubt for ever, but I could not do it without bidding you farewell."

The pettishness of illness on the one side, and the assumed composure of manner on the other, melted with these words, and the sisters were locked in a fond and tearful embrace.

"And you do not blame me very much," said Jane, after a moment's pause, "you who acted so differently in your hour of trial."

"And broke my heart by my obedience! I do not blame; on the contrary, I counsel you to marry Percy Groves. You love one another,—what have you here to compensate for love?"

"My heart bleeds the most, Annie, at leaving you."

"Yes, I shall miss you very much; but though I know my

misery and my illness have made me very selfish, I am not so selfish as to wish to rob you of happiness. Oh, Jane! such trials as mine, and the wakeful idle hours of sickness, give a strange knowledge that does not always come with grey hairs. I know some people would say it is a one-sided knowledge, perhaps it is so, or may be it is only applicable to characters who have strong affections; I tell you I am dying, pining away for the want of affection; I have known it once, and the want that is left in my heart is a sickening pain. It may be morbid or whatever you like to call it; but I tell you a chance fond name or caressing word, even from the lips of a mere acquaintance, and when I know that it has little or no meaning, thrills through my frame:—and I watch and watch like a thirsty creature panting for water, for some such tenderness from my parents; but it never comes. And yet they fee doctors to cure me, and spend money lavishly about me, and are with me almost constantly, and yet never seem to know what alone would bring me back to health. He was unworthy: as parents, I do think they were right to separate us; but, oh! how wrong to have allowed the intimacy, and then suppose that I could part from him at their bidding, without this woe. He may be all they say,—untrue, a mere fortune-hunter; and yet he seemed to love me and I believed him. Why don't they give me other love to fill the place? why don't they sympathise in all the suffering that obedience has cost me, and bestow kind words instead of reproof?"

"Has my love been nothing to you?" murmured Jane.

"Yes, it has been much. But even a sister's affection cannot be all that a parent's might be. Besides, latterly, the one who has been so much dearer to you has come like a cloud between us. No fault of yours—quite natural; it was the same with me a year ago."

Jane Laurington rather felt than understood the keen misery

which could have drawn such bitter words from a warped, yet naturally loving nature. And yet was there in them that terrible truth which forbids oblivion.

"Annie," she exclaimed, after another pause, "do you think they will ever forgive me—ever receive me again."

"I cannot tell; perhaps yes—perhaps no. When you have not sympathy with people, you cannot guess what they will do, under any given circumstances. I do not think they have any suspicion of your attachment, have they?"

"Not the least; and it is for this horrible deception that I hate myself. Knowing from the first that Percy had nothing but his profession to depend upon, I was certain they would not give their consent——"

"And so did not ask it, warned by my example."

"Forgive me, dearest, though Percy may be poor, he is not unworthy. I know in our case all the degrading consequences of the Iron Rule have followed—falsehood, cheater, and deception of many sorts; but still, if he were a fortune-hunter, he would not take me thus, for, certainly, fortune I have none."

"And what will you do, my poor Jane?"

"He has a little money, and he hopes to establish a practice soon; and I think that I have a right to take away my share of the jewels Sir James left us." As she spoke she looked at her watch, and started at finding the hour it indicated. Presently she approached the window and drew aside the curtain. A tremor was visible throughout her whole frame. She knew for whom was waiting a common cab that stood at the corner of the street, visible enough by the neighbouring gas-light. It seemed as if she saw the gulf that was opening at her feet, and that she felt how desperate and unwomanly a plunge she was taking. Pale as marble, she tottered once more to the bedside, and clung to the hangings for support.

"If I wait another half hour," she cried, "the servants will be stirring. Yet my limbs refuse to move."

"Go!" exclaimed Annie, with a sort of dreadful calmness; "go, if it is time. I wish you would take my jewels also, for I shall never wear them, or want them."

"Bless you for the thought; but not for worlds should you be implicated in my flight."

"Well—well, go while you can. I wonder Smith has not been in to see if I wanted her—not that she would betray you. And, Jenny, write to me soon, under cover to her, of course."

One more long, tearful embrace, and the invalid buried her face in the pillows; and, after a little while, half-smothered sobs might have been heard alternating with the dull creaking of the falling fire. But there was no sister there to hear. Stealthily as a thief, and fearfully as a cowardly culprit, the elder daughter of the house had glided down the wide stone-staircase; the heavy fastenings of the ponderous door might have defied her efforts, had she not affected, some days before, an extraordinary interest in the mechanism of locks, and besought the porter to show her how this one moved. In the stillness of early morning Annie heard distinctly the sharp bang of the cab door, and the next moment the rattle of wheels rolling away at a rapid rate proclaimed to her heart that already the sisters were sundered—already the step was taken on which the future of more than one life would depend!

We have not space, nor is it necessary, to follow Jane Laurington, until, in a few hours, she became the wife of the companion of her flight. Doubtless, she must have felt all the cruel wrestling of passion and affection, backed by a lover's specious argument, combating with a sense of duty and womanly modesty and dignity; while the cruellest thought of all was, the thought, the fear, that even in the eyes of him she loved, she lost a glory by wedding in such a manner.

So soon as the ceremony was over, a letter was addressed to Colonel Laurington, informing him of the fact. The reign of deception was at length ended ; there was no pretence of penitence expressed, only regret that they had found it necessary to take such a step. Certainly it was not a letter likely to conciliate a stern parent ; and yet had the writers of it been permitted to look upon the hearts they had lacerated, the hopes they had crushed, the faith they had destroyed, and even the affection they had spurned, they would have shrunk from the contemplation of their flight as of a deed of horror. How many domestic miseries arise from misunderstandings ; from mutual want of faith, want of trust, and want of sympathy !

His heart might be riven, but Colonel Laurington's was too stern a nature to be soon or easily moved from his sense of right. He refused to see the offenders ; but, contrary to their expectations, sent his daughter a present of money, with which Percy Groves, the young surgeon, purchased a country practice, and endeavoured to establish himself.

Meanwhile, the son, Sydaey, was at college, incurring debts and spending money faster than he acquired knowledge, if the reports heard from tolerably good authorities were to be accredited. Though as it was not the vocation of any one in particular to apprise his family of his doings, they were the last to hear of them. Unused as a boy to the control of time or money, in those just proportions which might have taught him the value of both, there is no wonder that freedom from harsh government came to him as a sort of moral intoxication, just as we are told that a captive, long immured in a dark and noisome dungeon, staggers if brought suddenly into the fresh air, and to the bright light of heaven.

And the youngest and fairest, a being that seemed born for love and joy, to be the light of some happy home, was fading away—*dying* day by day of dread consumption,—the fatal

disease whose course can be so seldom stayed, but whose origin has so often been traced to mental depression and early sorrows. Alas ! for the stern parents, we must pity so much that we forget to blame them. Not yet had they learned the hard lesson, and understood how early severity had steeled their children's hearts ; closed the lips that were seeking to prattle their childish thoughts, and so establish habits of confidence ; and repelled those clinging affections from their natural support, which, tendril-like, must twine somewhere.

When hearts are filled with holy affections, and Home is happy, then do the young dwell in a charmed circle, which only the naturally depraved would seek to quit, and across which boundary temptations to error shine out but feebly.

CHAPTER V.

"And I have better news in store for you
Than you expect: unseal this letter soon;
There you shall find, three of your argosies
Are richly come to harbour suddenly."

SHAKESPEARE.

Most persons must have remarked that the visitations of sorrow commonly reach us in some unlooked-for shape. The calamity we dread and guard against less frequently arrives than those of which we have never thought or dreamed. Thus was it in the happy home of the Maxwells; and though the shadow was but a passing one, it must be recorded for the elucidation of our theme. The fortune which rendered Walter Maxwell independent, he looked upon, not as so many do, either as the means of selfish enjoyment, or in itself "an end," as if the mere possession of so much money were itself a happiness. No: he was grateful to Providence for an easy income, most especially because it gave him the great boon, leisure, by means of which he could devote himself to science, and the darling studies which it comprehends—the studies which from the dawning of manhood had been to him the very soul of his intellectual existence. Dwelling in his father's house—that home cemented in happiness by the ties of kindred and affection—his personal wants were few; but in prosecuting those inquiries, by which he hoped to be an humble instrument of benefiting and advancing mankind, he found ample employment for his income. For the purpose of thus devoting his time and his fortune he had relinquished the *opportunity* which had offered to him of joining in his father's

mercantile pursuits; so that on a younger brother the partnership in them would ultimately devolve. It may be imagined therefore how much beyond wealth, as a mere acquisition, Walter Maxwell valued the independence which left him free from toil, and enabled him by the purchase of books and instruments, and occasional travel, to follow out his favourite studies to his heart's content. His high ambition and noble endeavours—to be paralysed should he sink to dependence—must be borne clearly in mind, or that which was in reality a generous sacrifice will seem but an ordinary act of duty.

Absorbed as Walter was in scientific inquiries, yet he was the first to observe that Mr. Maxwell was oppressed with some deep and sudden care. A sorrow which, from whatever cause it arose, he struggled hard to conceal from his family. He was much surprised one day to receive a visit from his son at the counting-house.

"Father," said Walter, "if you can spare me five minutes in your private room, pray do."

Of course Mr. Maxwell acceded to his request, though not without some wonderment at the occasion of such a visit. Indeed, though Walter was labouring under feelings of painful excitement and anxiety, the manner in which he looked about him—at the high desks and silent busy clerks, the charts which hung upon the walls, lists of ships, and many other adornments of a merchant's counting-house—showed that he was nearly a stranger there.

"My dear father," began Walter, so soon as the door had closed upon them, and speaking with much feeling, "your children have never been taught to use ceremony with their parents; perhaps they love them too well to stand upon cold forms or to utter words of deference. The truth is, and to be brief with it, I am sure you are unhappy. I am equally certain that it is no home sorrow which presses upon you. Now, as your

eldest son, I ask you—I would almost say I have a right to ask you—what is it, that I may give sympathy at any rate, help if possible ? ”

“ My dear, noble boy,” said Mr. Maxwell, grasping his hand affectionately, but he paused abruptly, as if in indecision.

“ Tell me,” reiterated Walter.

“ You *shall* give me sympathy, and perhaps advice,” exclaimed his father, after another brief pause.

“ And why not help,” interrupted Walter, “ if it is, as I expect, that you suddenly want money ? Though you know I seldom trouble myself about business matters, I do chance to know that you have had heavy dealings with two Amsterdam houses which have lately failed, and that by an additional stroke of ill-fortune your old friend and connection at Lisbon is a fellow bankrupt. With all your resources these things must have told upon you. In a word I can instantly command ten thousand pounds and some few hundreds. Will that be enough, or how much do you want ? ”

“ May Heaven reward you, my boy,” exclaimed Mr. Maxwell, “ for your noble, generous thought, but not for thrice ten thousand pounds would I consent to beggar you thus.”

“ You would not beggar me. Things would surely come round, and some day you would return it.”

“ So I hope, and in my conscience most truly believe. Nevertheless mercantile affairs are so complicated, and different houses so commonly hang together like a string of beads, that when the thread has once snapped it is wise to be prepared for further calamities.”

“ But your credit, your honour, my dearest father ! ”

“ My credit is not yet injured ; and my honour shall not be, even if the worst happen.”

“ How can you preserve your honour untarnished if the *worst happen* ? ”

"I would give up everything to my creditors, and this I could do without merit or pain, since my children are provided for; and, if we should fail, our books would show our misfortune had not happened from over speculation, but from the bad faith of others or their proving defaulters. I feel that I have no right to draw your fortune into my business at such an hour of doubt and danger. Such conduct to a friend or acquaintance would be downright robbery: shall I be guilty of it to my own child!"

"But, father, it is a free-will offering."

"In a word, my dearest Walter, I will not do it. And you know I never swerve from my word. But if the thought be any reward to you, know that, amid all my anxiety, you have made me supremely happy by such a proof of affection and devotion. God bless you, my noble-hearted boy."

"And you will not have any assistance?" said Walter, taking up his hat.

"Not a guinea!"

Walter walked leisurely down the quiet street in which his father's counting-house was situated; and, before he reached the thoroughfare into which it led, he looked at his watch and paused a moment. "Only two o'clock," he murmured to himself; "plenty of time to do it to-day." He then called a cab, and, after giving certain directions to the driver, begged him not to lose time. Away he dashed, first to a stockbroker's near the bank, then to the Bank of England itself, then to two or three places within a stone's throw of the same, and finally to a celebrated and most substantial banker's at the west end of the town.

The following morning when Mr. Maxwell reached his counting-house, he found on his desk a letter, addressed in a strange and cramped hand, and marked "private and particular." It contained these words:—

"A gentleman who is aware of the difficulties which exist among several of the commercial relations of Messrs. Maxwell and Allerton, has placed the sum of ten thousand pounds in C——'s bank, to the account of those gentlemen. The individual who requests them to accept this loan, considers himself under the deepest obligations to Mr. Maxwell, for benefits conferred through a series of years, although it is very likely he may be in a measure unconscious of the services he has rendered. Moreover, to avoid anxiety or inconvenience, the lender hereby pledges himself never to call upon Messrs. Maxwell and Allerton for the said sum; although, as he believes, they will the more readily accept the loan if they see before them a manner of returning it, he may remark that a brief and guarded advertisement in the *Times* newspaper from M. and A. to Z., would be a token which he would understand, and to which he would reply, by again communicating with them privately."

To say that Mr. Maxwell was "thunder-stricken," or seemed "in a dream," on reading this epistle, seems but to use a common figure of speech. With the lightning speed of thought he tried to remember who they were, who, in all the years of his active life, he had served and obliged. But he had more often helped the needy, than sought the favour of the rich, and not one name presented itself, with which he could connect the likely possession of such a sum to be thus freely and carelessly offered. However, as the letter concerned his partner as well as himself, he felt it to be his duty to consult Mr. Allerton, who was a younger man, and of a more sanguine character than himself, and who was overjoyed at the opportune appearance of this unknown friend, and instantly advised that they should avail themselves of the timely loan.

"A princely fellow, whoever he may be," exclaimed Mr. Allerton, "and he shall have princely interest for his money."

" Ah, when we are able to pay it ! "

" And that will be in a few weeks, or months at farthest.—Why this is worth more to us now than twenty thousand pounds would have been next week. It will carry us without tottering over the great settling day. I wonder who he is?—What an old-fashioned cramped hand!—Some ancient friend of the family, no doubt. Well, till now, I thought such people only lived in fairy tales."

Thanks to the assistance of the unknown friend, the firm of Maxwell and Allerton weathered the commercial storm ; and were able to wait with composure the settlement of various mercantile affairs. Of course, the circumstance of the singular loan was not made generally known, but Mr. Maxwell mentioned it to his son, feeling it due to relieve him from the anxiety he felt sure he was suffering. Almost contrary to his expectation, Walter thought his father had done quite right to avail himself of the money.

" Well, Walter," said Mr. Maxwell, a few weeks afterwards, " as we are all safe again, I hope, as the Bank itself, I will come upon you for a loan, though not, my dear boy, to the extent you offered. We are naturally anxious to apprise this most noble-hearted Z., that he will not lose his money. Now if you will lend us two thousand pounds, for a couple of months, we can make up the sum in about a fortnight. In fact, I told Allerton I could rely upon you."

" Of course, my dear father—that is—I will come to the counting-house between two and three to-day."

There was, really, some hesitation in his tone ; but happily Mr. Maxwell did not remark it. This occurred just as he was leaving home in the morning.

Walter Maxwell paced the breakfast-room for a few minutes in evident, though not in disagreeable perplexity, but presently his sister Caroline entered, and he said,—

"Ah! Carry, you are just the person I want; come up to my laboratory—we shall not be disturbed there. I have something to say to you in private."

And up they mounted to the attic story of the house, where a large room was set apart for Walter's use. It was a balmy May morning, and the sunshine streamed in upon a most heterogeneous mass of furniture, certainly. In one corner a galvanic battery kept watch over some specimens of fossil remains; in another stood a gigantic pair of globes, while books, and chemical apparatuses of various sorts, filled up the remaining space. Here the conference was held; Walter informing his sister of all the reader has surely guessed—how he had been the mysterious friend, and how he sadly wanted two thousand pounds with which to repay—himself.

"For," he observed, "if I tell my father the truth just now, Allerton must know all about it; and he is such a talker that it would be no secret. Besides which, it would prevent my ever doing the same thing again; and this is a power I would not willingly forego."

"By all means, Walter," exclaimed his sister; "I must find you the money. Only set me in the way of it, for I am not at all a person of business."

"I will do that, for I am quite experienced in 'selling out.'"

"Ah, Walter, you ought to have told me all this, and have allowed me to share with you the original loan."

"No, Carry; I think it was the privilege of an eldest son. But come, get on your bonnet, and be ready to go with me into the City."

"That mysterious 'City,'" exclaimed Caroline, laughing, "where money is lost, and won, and coined, and spent, and everybody looks very busy and rather dirty. I remember," *she added*, "when I was a little girl, I used to fancy there was

an immense gold mine somewhere there. Well, I shall be ready in five minutes."

And away she tripped, much happier in contemplating "selling out" two thousand pounds under such circumstances, than if she had been adding as much to her fortune.

"There is one person, you know, I ought to tell," said Caroline to her brother, after all the tedious business of the day had been satisfactorily transacted.

"William, of course," he replied with a smile; "especially as a fortnight hence it will not be Caroline *Maxwell*, I shall repay."

"How fortunate," she continued, "that the settlements were not drawn out, or there would have been more confusion with the lawyers and more confidences to make."

William Morton was "lover-like" and romantic enough to rejoice that Caroline had perilled a part of her fortune in so holy a cause. He had often told her that he wished she had not a fortune; and he bore this trifling test so admirably that she really began to believe him. But, alas! the unlucky marriage settlement!—this was the rock on which the secret split. The young plotters were completely over-reached. They had forgotten that the precise old lawyer who drew up the marriage settlement might require to see Caroline's securities—which were minus two thousand pounds—and that Mr. Maxwell would of course examine the deed.

Yes, there was no help for it—the secret was suddenly revealed two days before Caroline's marriage. She had never told a falsehood in her life, and did not know how to set about one.

There are some scenes in private life too sacred for description. Let us draw a veil over that which followed. A veil through which imagination only can see faces full of tearful joy, and holy mute caresses more eloquent than words.

And yet, imagination too may hear some half-rebukes w
end in blessings, and breathings full of deep affection. .
the wedding—we have not space to relate particulars ; su
it is enough that Caroline has been for years the happ
of wives.

There is a flourishing firm which now stands as Max
Allerton, and Maxwell, a younger son having been taken
the concern. They say Walter is going to marry a young
with a fortune at least equal to his own ; popular report :
that she is pretty, and a *blue*—that is to say, just lear
enough to make an excellent secretary and amanuensis to
husband ; and, to own the truth, in matters of science very
ladies can take a higher degree than this. She thinks he
prove a distinguished man one of these days, and, indeed,
is not singular in her opinion.

CHAPTER VI.

"Grief hallows hearts even while it ages heads."

FESTUS.

ONCE more must we turn to the Lauringtons, though the transition is from happiness to woe, from sunshine to clouds and darkness.

Annie lingered but a few months after the elopement of her sister, dying, in fact, shortly after the marriage of her cousin. After her death, it was discovered that every little article of value, which might be called hers personally, was labelled with a request that it might be given to her sister. An injunction of this kind was rigidly obeyed; but her parents were infinitely afflicted by discovering a packet of letters from Jane, which proved that Annie had kept up, through her servant, a clandestine correspondence with the fugitive, nay, that she had even been admitted into the house unknown to them. Such a discovery jarred with the fond memory of the dead which they had wished to cherish, and, alas! steeled their hearts yet more against the living. It is strange, yet true, that the most strict and severe, and suspicious persons, are precisely those who are most often deceived. Suspicion is so rarely directed aright, that cunning is more than a match for it; and oppression ever begets cunning, which is the dwarfed and deformed cleverness of the slave.

Years rolled on. For "the honour of the family," Colonel Laurington discharged debts to an enormous amount, contracted by his son, at college. "If I had had the courage to

tell you of my first folly," said Sydney, when at last his involvements were discovered, "all this misery would have been avoided." But worse results even than this waste of money followed, as the consequences of the Iron Rule. Children may be controlled by bars and locks, and governed despotically—as they sometimes are ; girls, even when arrived at womanhood, are slow to break from the yoke of custom, but seldom is it so with grown-up sons. They can only be governed by moral influence—an influence the harsh and severe parent very seldom possesses. Certainly Sydney Laurington showed no disposition to exchange the liberty—which had merged into licence—first experienced during his college life, for the austerities of the parental roof. No,—he preferred living on the most moderate allowance in freedom, to sharing all the splendour of home. As there were certain estates entailed upon his son, Colonel Laurington was in a measure compelled to make him this allowance, knowing full well that he would otherwise procure money at a most ruinous sacrifice. The Colonel urged him to make choice of some pursuit ; not as a means of additional income, but as a healthful employment of his energies. To make him a statesman had been the father's ambition ; but in politics the father and son were diametrically opposed, adopting the dangerous extremes of the two great parties. Sydney, however, showed no disposition to exert himself. Those who suffer from any particular error, are too apt to fancy that happiness lies in the other extreme ; thus poor Sydney had an absurd dread of even the most healthful and legitimate control over his actions and his time, and has sunk down into an idle, useless member of society.

And so the gorgeous home of the Lauringtons where wealth and luxury reigned was desolate to the parents, who, with all their sternness, had, nevertheless, after their fashion loved their *children*. The youngest and fairest and best beloved slept

under a marble monument; the other two, in the pathetic language of Scripture, "were not."

One day a packet of books which Colonel Laurington had lent to a friend were returned to him, wrapped in many papers to preserve them from the hazard of a public conveyance. One of these covers chanced to be a provincial newspaper, bearing the date of several months back. More from the vacancy of an idle hour than from any expected interest in its contents he glanced down its columns. Presently a half repressed exclamation escaped him.

"What is it you are reading?" asked Mrs. Laurington, who was present.

"Come here," he replied, in a voice of singular emotion; and leaning over his chair, and following his finger, she read in the obituary:—"On the 20th inst., after a lingering illness, Percy Groves, Esq., Surgeon, of this place. He has left a widow and two young orphans to deplore their irreparable loss."

The eyes of the husband and wife met, and were suffused with tears.

"Let us see her," suggested Mrs. Laurington.

"Yes," murmured the father: "poor thing!"

It was on a dull autumnal afternoon that a hired carriage drove up to a small house in the country town of —. The door was opened by a somewhat slovenly looking servant, a maid-of-all-work, who sometimes superadded to other duties those of a nurse. In answer to the inquiries which were made, she said that Mrs. Groves would be at home in about half-an-hour,—“would be sure to be in by the children's tea-time. Most days she was home by three o'clock; but on Tuesday she had five music lessons to give.”

An elderly lady descended from the carriage, saying she would walk in and wait until Mrs. Groves returned. And

an elderly gentleman leaned back in the corner, instead of alighting, in a manner which hid his face from the passers by. Mrs. Laurington, for she it was, was shown into a small drawing-room, where the servant also remained to prevent, if she could, the "children troubling the lady." These were a boy and girl, of about six or seven years old, shy and fretful, and showing by the small control the servant possessed over them, that they were, as the phrase goes, "spoilt." Nevertheless, the strict Mrs. Laurington seemed affected at beholding them, and perhaps their faded mourning frocks helped to touch her heart. By degrees she so far won their confidence as to obtain a kiss from each, and occasionally an answer to her questions and inquiries. But "where is mamma?" was the most often repeated phrase. When she asked if they would go away with her, and live in a large house, and have ponies to ride, and a doll—a beautiful doll with waxen hands and feet—they listened, not clearly understanding what it all meant. And when the "yes" was answered to all this fairy painting, it was promptly followed by "mamma must go too."

The meeting of the widow and her mother was one of mingled pain and happiness. Both had faults to own; and in the misery which had fallen on each, contrary to the common case, each exaggerated (where exaggeration could be) her own faults, and passed more lightly over those of the other. There was abundant evidence that Mr. Groves had been a disappointed man. Disappointed in his profession—disappointed in the easy fortune he had expected with his wife. The worst foe to domestic peace had ensued—irritability of temper; and poor Jane had paid a heavy penalty for her stolen and indiscreet marriage. Her whole soul had become absorbed in her maternal love, and from her shuddering dread of undue severity, she was fully conscious she had rushed to the other extreme, and had indulged her children according to every

infant caprice, weakly and unwisely. Such a consciousness made her pause and ponder, and ask herself if she might not have judged her own parents too harshly. Yet even when bereaved of her husband, she feared their wrath too much to ask their aid, and destitute as she and her orphans were left, applied herself, with a bravery that deserved some reward, to maintain them by the exercise of that musical talent and proficiency, for which she had been from her early years distinguished.

I have little more to add. The widow and her children dwell under Colonel Laurington's roof, surrounded with all the comforts which wealth can bestow. Chastened by suffering and rendered wise by experience, the parents and their daughter make allowance for each other's faults; and amid the ease and endearments of a Happy Home, and in the rearing of a third generation, endeavour to keep clear of fitful and capricious, or unwise indulgence, and certainly escape every symptom of the Iron Rule!





A STORY OF THE WEST END.

" And at night along the dusky highway near and nearer drawn,
Sees in heaven the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn ! "

TENNYSON.





A STORY OF THE WEST END.

CHAPTER I.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."—MACBETH.

THERE is a certain spot in one of the midland counties, which, for the sake of preserving its incognito, I will call Willow-dale. It is but three or four miles from a market town, yet lying away from the high road, and being still farther removed from any railroad, is about as secluded a place as any in England. Yet beautiful exceedingly is its rich meadow land; and pleasant to view the varied beauty of its flowering, fruitful orchards; and pure the health-giving breezes that come from the neighbouring hills. Above all, it has the exquisite charm of silence,—that profound silence which is felt as a delicious sensation! The few cottages which are scattered over about a quarter of a mile of the Dale, are called—by the dwellers therein—a village; though by malicious detractors they have been said to comprise only—a hamlet. Narrow the distinction, I grant; but measure two little persons together, and see if they do not stand upright, to say nothing of *getting on tiptoe* if they dare.

In one of the prettiest of these cottages lived for some years a widow and her two daughters. A small life annuity secured to Mrs. Sandford, was their only dependence; and Willow-dale had been chosen as a residence, because house rent was low, and the little income would go farther in such a neighbourhood than elsewhere. It does not seem to have occurred to the mother, that it was possible to add to their narrow means by any exertions of her own, and so provide against casualties. No; she was one of those characters in whom feminine softness borders very decidedly on feminine weakness. Of placid, unambitious temper, she thought little of the future, and was easily contented with the present. The little she did think for the future was, that of course her daughters would marry, and thus be provided for and protected. Too many mothers, who think little, think thus; and so neglect to cherish in those they love a spirit of self-reliance, or to place within their reach the means of self-dependence. Woe to the helpless in this struggling world!

The even thread of poor Mrs. Sandford's life was snapped suddenly at last. She was under fifty, and a week before her death had appeared in as robust health as ever. I wonder how many hundred evenings she had sat in the garden long after the heavy dew had risen; and yet at last to take cold that fine autumn night! To be sure, she was rather stout and plethoric, as became so "easy" a character,—and we know inflammatory diseases are especially dangerous to such persons. Mrs. Sandford dead! It came as a severe shock to all the kind-hearted neighbours, who crowded the pretty little cottage, as they eagerly pressed forward with offers of assistance. The medical man who had been called in—a new comer to the neighbourhood—looked sad and sympathising as he pressed the hands of the bereaved and weeping girls. "It was a most distressing case—so very sudden—pity he had not been called

in earlier," &c., &c. Well, he did not take the second fee Henrietta offered him, but put it back, and closed his own over her little hand, with a "No, no!—God bless you, my poor child." There was really a heart in his breast, beneath that rusty black waistcoat and snuff-besmeared frill.

The funeral was over, with its dull formalities, that seem so cold and are so heart-rending. Henrietta—or Etty, as she was generally called—was nineteen—and Clara five years her junior. Of course responsibility devolved on the elder sister—though, if in the multitude of counsellors there is always wisdom, they must have been sagely advised. Every member of the little community of Willow-dale was a friend—though, alas! with very limited power. The *catalogue raisonnée* of these might be as follows: Two elderly maiden sisters, who had lived in the county nearly all their lives—who had once seen the sea, but would have thought crossing it a tempting of Providence; the widow of an army surgeon, who knew, as one would judge from her lively reminiscences, a good deal of Indian life, but of no other; a half-pay captain, with health impaired, and carrying a bullet he received in "the Peninsula." But enough,—the list would be tedious, and would wear a strong family likeness. Much goodness of heart was there in the little band; but a small, very small share of that practical knowledge of the world, which would have been highly valuable in directing the desolate orphans. However, in one opinion they were unanimous; namely, that Henrietta should write to a wealthy cousin in Lancashire—the only relative she could claim,—and ask his advice and assistance. She did so, and he expressed much regret at her bereavement, enclosed a trifling present to assist in the purchase of mourning—and wished to be informed if Henrietta's acquirements were of a sort to qualify her for a governess. Timid and humble, she had no hesitation in answering "No,"—and

she was right; for though she loved reading, and had an active inquiring intellect, little food for the mind had been placed within her reach; and Mrs. Sandford's easy disposition had contented itself with imparting to her children the few "acquirements" she herself possessed. The wealthy relative then proposed that the girls should be apprenticed to a London dressmaker,—kindly considering it would be a satisfaction not to separate them, and generously offering to provide the requisite money.

The girls, though hardly yet recovered from the shock of their mother's death, still entered into the project with much of the eagerness and enthusiasm of youth: nor was there anything in the manner and opinions of their surrounding friends to chill their hopes of happiness and independence. The widow of the army surgeon very well remembered that a milliner in Calcutta had returned home, after five years of business, with a handsome fortune. The old maids were sure dressmakers must grow rich, they charged so enormously; and what was rather more to the present purpose, some one else knew somebody whose wife's sister-in-law's second cousin actually was a fashionable milliner in London, and this privileged friend became a person of considerable importance, on volunteering to make inquiries, and procure an introduction to the west end Celebrity. She did so; arrangements were soon completed, and a letter, the joint production of the sisters, was written to their rich relation, whom they had never seen, and towards whom, notwithstanding his kindness, they felt a mysterious awe mingled with their gratitude. Mrs. Sandford was not a person to have saved any thing from her little income; quite the contrary—she was rather "behind-hand;" so that when the furniture of the cottage was sold to pay rent and trifling debts, and travelling expenses were calculated, *Henrietta* found she would have about five pounds with which

to begin the world. Yet if good will, and, in many instances, some self-sacrifice, were taken into account, the poor orphans were very rich in keepsakes and parting offerings, presented to them by the Willow-dale community.

They were to reside in the establishment of Madame Dobière; such an arrangement having been taken into account in the premium paid. It was night when, after a wearying journey, they arrived at the mansion in — Street, Hanover Square, which was to be henceforth their home. They were almost awed at its grandeur, the brilliantly lit show-room, and the noble entrance; but something the opposite of this was felt when they were ushered, after a frugal meal, into the dingy, cold, uncomfortable garret, crowded with beds, not destined to be pressed, for hours to come, by the toil-worn band our orphans were about to join. Poor girls! had they been less ignorant of the world and its ways, that night would have been yet more sorrowful than it proved. The morsel of candle with which they had been entrusted warned them to hurry their unpacking; but it was a moonlight night, and long after they had wept in each other's arms—they scarcely knew why—and endeavoured to sleep, the bright light which streamed through the curtainless windows, seemed to come as if with a message to keep them from repose. That very moonlight, which had for so many years fallen on their neat white bed, casting in the summer, when they needed no other curtain, the quivering shadow of their trained laburnum.

Clara was the first to sleep; but after the clocks from the neighbouring steeples had tolled one, the door was opened, and Henrietta saw a pale thin girl of twenty enter. There was nothing remarkable in her appearance; there are hundreds such rise and toil every day, and wither and die every year, in the great metropolis. She attempted to undress, but sleep overpowered her, and she threw herself on a bed without even

removing her gown. Again the church clocks struck, telling that another hour belonged to the past. Soon afterwards two apprentices were heard upon the creaking stairs; and when they had entered, and Henrietta had had time to notice them, she felt surprised that they, up an hour later, were evidently less fatigued than their companion; but the mystery was soon solved.

"Poor Bessy!" said one, alluding to the girl who lay dressed upon the bed; "two nights has she been up: I thought she would have fallen asleep over that fancy ball dress. Well, I suppose our turn will come before the week is out; for though it is not the season, and I call it a shame to have such 'long hours,' *she* won't have 'day hands' for this country order, so what is to be done?"

"Oh, don't talk," said the other; "I am so tired, and my eyes so prickle, let us get to bed when we can."

And to bed they hurried, without bending the knee to ONE. Let us hope that some murmured prayer to guide and bless, mounted to HIS throne!

From sheer bodily weariness Henrietta Sandford fell asleep before three other occupants of that gloomy attic entered singly and softly.

Madame Dobière piqued herself on the method of her irregularities. Indeed, she talked about it as if it were a system for the strict performance of the cardinal virtues. From frequently hearing the same precepts inculcated, it is possible that the more impressible minds among her young workwomen half believed that they were in one of the best conducted establishments in London. Madame was a little sharp-featured woman, who usually dressed in black silk, or brown merino, without tuck or trimming; because ladies do not like to see their milliners themselves adopt the *mode* they recommend. But on Sundays, and on the

frequent holidays she gave herself—Cinderella's fairy change could not have been more striking than hers. It was even said she had once been found out, in borrowing from her show-room a bonnet destined for a countess. Yet I am afraid she would have been shocked at the mere accusation, for Madame Dobière stickled much for propriety. For instance, she would not suffer a brother to visit one of her resident apprentices—it was not proper where there were so many young women, whom she felt herself bound to protect; but at midnight, her “day hands” might traverse the streets alone on their way to their wretched lodgings! Madame Dobière was also one of that class, who, like the monkey in the fable, always find a “paw” to win for them the object of their desires. She could not have cut out and fitted a dress herself, if she might have had the making of a hundred dresses for doing it. But to hear her angry blame at failure, and matter-of-course treatment of success in others, who could ever have guessed her own inability?

Not at first any of those by whom she was surrounded; for the corps of dressmakers is commonly recruited from unsophisticated country girls. And thus would she harangue on the subject of her admirable arrangements—how “in the season she had so many extra hands, that few were kept up more than one night a week,—how at other times of the year, they often worked only twelve hours a day—though, of course, they must take their chance, if work should come in. After all, what was a night's rest to a young person?—she should not care for it at all, were it not that her mind required repose—she worked harder than they—the whole weight of the business was on her;” and then she would wind up with a sigh, or throw herself back in her chair apparently exhausted. In conclusion, Mr. Dobière (his real name was Dobs; but Madame, having travelled as lady's maid in her youth, and having thus

picked up a few French phrases, thought it expedient to Frenchify that plebeian monosyllable,) was a peaceable individual, whose occupation, whatever it was, called him "into the City" every morning. He was punctual as clock-work—always returning at six; when, if he did not take Madame to the play, and they had not a few friends to drink tea, or had not some equally pleasant engagement, he usually assisted his wife in arranging her accounts.

Who, then, did manage the business of this pleasure-loving lady? Her factotum—a woman who received a high salary, for which she certainly worked indefatigably. But Miss Smith was a greater tyrant than Madame; and was one of those hard, passionless, yet scolding women, who receive unanimously the title of shrews. Tyranny usually confirms a selfish character, which longs to become a tyrant in turn, and to this had she been moulded by the ordeal of her own past apprenticeship. Yet as heat, which hardens one substance, may dissolve another; so did the busy party gathered in Madame Dobière's workroom present, in varied development of character, a most fruitful theme for philosophic inquiry.

But our country girls were no philosophers. They did not attempt to trace cause and effect, or even to wonder how it was that one of their companions was silent, and selfish, and morose; why another was irritable and angry one hour, and the next winning love by her exalted generosity. Yea exalted, perhaps, in taking on herself some mutual blame, or relieving with her more nimble fingers the slow or dull. What little kindnesses become great ones to the wretched and oppressed! Nor did they seek to know why they all were pale and thin; or how it was that many had weak eyes, and not a few suffered from distortion of the spine. Yet, by degrees, Henrietta perceived how different must be their existence from that which *their inexperience* had painted. But they had good constitutions

in their favour, and Etty bore up bravely for a while against the sedentary life—the poor living—the want of sleep—and want of relaxation ; while her character was developed by intense application to acquire skill in the business ; and so great was her progress, that in an incredibly short space of time she became one of the most efficient “ hands ” in Madame Dobière’s establishment. Yet this very concentration of her energies, perhaps, prevented her from perceiving the gradual but melancholy change that was taking place in Clara ; though dearly she loved her, with an affection more protecting than is generally that of a sister ; and so blended did it seem with her own life, that the most powerful motive she had felt to exertion was the hope that dear Clara’s opening youth might be passed more brightly than her own could be.

Thus passed the winter ; and now the “ busy season ” had arrived.

CHAPTER II.

“Work—work—work!
Till the brain begins to swim!
Work—work—work!
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!”—Hood.

“ETTY,” said the child to her sister, one day, speaking in a high-pitched tone across the room—“Etty, I am so giddy—so ill;” and before Etty could fling down her work and reach her side, Clara had fainted—saved only from a serious fall by some nearer companion.

“Throw some water over her,” said Miss Smith, without relinquishing for a moment her own cutting out—“she ’ll soon come to again;—why, one would think you had never seen a girl faint before!”

But the water did not restore her, and Henrietta and one of her companions carried her from the close and crowded room. The fresh air was more curative, and before they had reached their dormitory, Clara had recovered her senses.

“Oh! stay with me, Etty,” said the sufferer,—“do not leave me.”

“I will stay, darling—be composed.” And Henrietta pillowed her sister’s head upon her bosom, while hot tears coursed down both their cheeks; those of the elder girl flowing partly from a sort of self-reproach, that she had not before noticed the hollow eyes and pallid countenance of her dear Clara.

“You are ill, my sister,” she continued—“you must have advice—they will surely send for a doctor. Let me go, dearest, *just to ask this*—I will be back directly.”

"No, no, there is no need," returned the other; "I think—I am almost sure, that I am only faint for want of food. I did not tell you, dear,—what use would it have been?—but I could not eat that coarse dry bread and cheese last night—and then, to-day again, that horrid fat cold mutton. Oh! Etty, is it wrong of me to be so dainty?"

"Dainty, indeed!" murmured the girl who had assisted to carry her up stairs—"dainty, indeed! we are all sick to death of the hard Dutch cheese, and the everlasting mutton. But Madame contracts with her butcher—and the worse the meat is, the less we eat. It is a shame, that it is—and I am sure you girls are the worst off of all, for you have no friends to go to on a Sunday, and so don't get a dinner even once a week."

There was a quick step upon the creaking stairs, and in a moment Miss Smith threw open the door.

"Come, Sandford," said she, "you don't suppose you can waste half an hour of daylight, dawdling up here, do you? Besides, that tarletan dress is promised for to-night, and"—Miss Smith corrected herself; she was going to say, "no one understands that *papillon* trimming so well as yourself;" but she thought it more expedient to change the phrase for "I cannot spare any one to help you."

Henrietta looked up, but neither spoke nor moved.

"Say you'll come in a minute or two," murmured the other girl, certainly without turning her head, almost without moving her lips. "Get rid of her," she continued; "I want to speak to you."

"I will come in a few moments," said Henrietta, obeying the advice mechanically. And Miss Smith bounced out of the room.

"Have you got any money?" asked the girl.

"Yes, one sovereign," replied Henrietta; "but that is all; for we were to have no salary for the first six months."

"Pity to change it," said her interrogator, quickly; "money flies when once it is changed; I will lend you a shilling, and coax one of the servants to get her something hot and nice—that will do her more good than all the doctors."

The kind-hearted friend was quite right; it was food the poor child wanted, although there is no exact record of what "hot and nice" thing it was that one shilling purchased.

Strange it was, but true, that from that hour everything in the establishment of Madame Dobière wore a different aspect to Henrietta's eyes. In common parlance, "the veil had dropped from them." A trite phrase; but there is a difference between understanding a metaphor and feeling its truth. The latter was now Etty's case; she felt, instinctively, how thick had been the "veil" through which she had hitherto looked, woven perhaps by that over-anxiety to excel, which had half-deadened every other faculty. But now her intelligent mind, quickened by keen feeling, perceived the truth; and called into the show-room by Madame on her way down stairs from leaving Clara, she listened to what was going on with quite different feelings from those she had hitherto experienced.

"At a word, Madame Dobière," said a fashionable-looking personage,— "at a word, will you, or will you not, promise me the dress by six o'clock to-morrow?"

"Really," exclaimed Madame, in a hesitating manner, "really—I don't know—the time is so very short—if I had only had it yesterday——"

"Oh! very well," returned the lady—"I would not be disappointed on any account. And I have no doubt Mrs. P—— can make it up for me; in fact, I have been very particularly recommended to try her."

"Well, ma'am," interrupted Madame Dobière, dreading *that her rival would take away a customer*, "to oblige you,

ma'am, I will undertake it—but I assure you we must work half the night."

"Oh! nonsense, you always say that; I am sure I have often had a dress made up in less than four-and-twenty hours."

Probably she had; and probably it never occurred to the thoughtless woman, as she rolled away in her carriage, enervated by worldly prosperity, and made selfish by perpetual luxury, that she had on such occasions done her part in wearing out not only silks and satins, but youth, health, and life. And for what? To minister to what a powerful writer calls "the disgusting foolery of idiotic vanities," the arrangements for which must be delayed till the last moment, because the pampered dame cannot decide between blue and pink; or because she must wait for a letter from Paris, to tell her, from head-quarters, the prevailing mode; or—which is not at all unlikely—because she has outrun her pin-money, and is some days screwing her courage to ask husband or father for "only ten pounds." In nineteen cases out of twenty, the hurry at last proceeds from some such contemptible cause; so that when the mere fashionist hears by chance the wrongs of the poor apprentices canvassed, it were at least wise of her not to throw a stone at the mistresses, whom she so often drives, certainly, to one sort of tyranny. Yet what is so monstrous as woman with a hard heart?—and well may we believe that many who seem cruel, are only—thoughtless. Alas! I fear that those among us who judge ourselves the most considerate, have sins of this kind, both of omission and commission, for which we must answer.

Nor was this all. A shudder ran through Henrietta's veins, as now she remembered that even in six months two of their young companions had been snatched away by death; one breathing her last in the house, and tidings of the death of

the other having reached them in less than a month after her removal. Another circumstance, too, would dwell in her mind—aye, and in a different form from that it had borne yesterday.

Within the last few weeks, the girl before mentioned, with hasty temper and strong feelings, but yet whom everybody loved, had ceased to be among them. She was not dead. Nay, her fine constitution had so battled with the trials which she had encountered, that they had scarcely dimmed her radiant beauty; besides, this orphan girl had been but a few months exposed to their evil influence. What then? She had parted from her companions suddenly, though, as it afterwards proved, she must have made her preparations for days. And now there were vague rumours of ease—nay, splendour and luxury—but that she was an outcast, a thing to be shunned and abhorred! And with all the horror with which innocence does and should look upon vice, had Henrietta regarded her, until an incident only the day before had changed scorn into something very like gratitude in more hearts than one.

Nicely timed, arriving at the hour when Madame Dobière and Miss Smith were almost always in the show-room, was delivered a huge packet, addressed to one of the apprentices, who had been the chief favourite of the erring sister. It was found to contain several pounds of tea and sugar, with these words roughly scrawled in pencil:—

“From Fanny, for all of you;—more when this is used; but you had better not say where from.”

Now tea was the one great luxury; the best thing in the world for the “dreadful headaches” from which they all, more or less, suffered. And yet, as a wretchedly small quantity was allowed to them, the feelings with which the present of the outcast was received, may be easily understood. Yet though the deed were one to be registered in heaven’s chancery, it had *all the hurtful* influence which good, proceeding through evil,

almost ever acquires ; even as clear water passes not over mud without growing impure. It is, surely, much to be desired and rejoiced at, that the wise and thoughtful of the gentler sex, who are removed by station from insult, and by holy affections from temptation, should look sometimes upon the fallen with sorrow and compassion, and not justify the poet's words, that—

“ Every woe a tear can claim,
Except an erring sister's shame.”

But among those who, so far from being protected from temptation, are exposed to it on every side, the case is wholly different. To such hearts, pity, or a yearning affection for its object, is a dangerous guest,—one that may stealthily destroy the finer perceptions of the moral sense, till, in the confusion of right and wrong, little else than a chaos remains. Perhaps Madame Dobière's poor apprentices had better have continued to drink “slop,” or milk and water, than, by the force of circumstances, to have thought of the fallen Fanny with gratitude, and to have spoken of her among themselves with a lingering kindness, a strange curiosity, and a pleasant surprise, at finding that she was not a monster—not devoid of human sympathies. Alas! Henrietta Sandford, the comparatively recent comer, the country girl brought up with strictest principles, but taught by suffering, was beginning to understand and make allowances for temptation ;—a dangerous knowledge—a perilous frame of mind.

CHAPTER III.

"'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall."—MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

SOME months passed away, Clara growing worse and worse, being not unfrequently confined to her bed; and Henrietta, improving wonderfully in her business, sustained in her exertions only by a hope she had nursed almost into realisation. With the shrewdness she had now acquired, she was quite aware of the value of her own services; and now that their salaries had begun, her hope was that she should induce Madame Dobière somewhat to increase them, on condition that they lived out of the house. There was not much difficulty in coming to this arrangement; for, in the first place, a sickly child like Clara was a frequent trouble; and, in the next, Madame Dobière, who used a large proportion of her house for show-rooms, was extremely glad to have accommodation for two more apprentices. How the poor girls revelled in the idea of their humble lodging, which would be home to them! and Clara was sure she "should do quite as much work,—for even if she were too ill to come out, Etty could always bring home plenty for her." And so it was. And at first, in their lowly dwelling, they found something, comparatively speaking, like comfort: yet was it a new phase of life, with new dangers as well as new pleasures.

Of course their pittance was as little as would support life, though, fortunately for their appearance, they possessed a *tolerably* good wardrobe, which had hitherto required but

little replenishing. I cannot tell how it was—I only relate the fact—that they did somehow or other make acquaintances; and on the Sundays, after their late rising, for toil-wearied, and worn out for want of proper rest, they seldom left their bed in time for church, they often spent the remainder of the summer Sunday in some excursion with one or two of their fellow-apprentices and their companions. Apparently this was the only avenue for acquaintanceship of any sort; yet so much did the thing extend, that their Sunday parties—generally to some favourite suburban spot—were very seldom omitted. Doubtless, air and exercise once a week were very beneficial to them; and at all events, Clara's failing health was Henrietta's best excuse for granting themselves the indulgence. Besides, it cost them little or nothing; for these parties always consisted of friends of both sexes, and the "gentler sex" never paid. Alas! for the fact that it was so; for the right pride—no matter how lowly the station—true feminine dignity is surely one of the brightest jewels in the crown of womanhood!

Yet it could scarcely have been as the companion of milliners' apprentices and of shopmen, that Henrietta Sandford first met one, whom she knew only by the name of Charles Weston. How did they meet? Was it the civility of offering half an umbrella one rainy night? One has heard of such things; or was he interested in Clara's appearance, when he chanced one Sunday, in the Park, to seat himself on a bench beside her? and being in the medical profession, did he offer advice and attendance? I think I have heard a rumour of some such origin of their acquaintance. Yet not how it began, but how it progressed, is the question. Clara gradually became worse; for she was in a decline, and, though for long she knew it not, was beyond the reach of human aid. The Sunday excursions were gradually discontinued; yet, had Clara been well, all incli-

nation for them was now gone from the heart of Henrietta. Although not accomplished, not well educated, she inherited from her father some natural refinement of mind; and the power of early association was strong; so that the conversation of Charles Weston, and his kindly sympathy, seemed to bring back early days, and with them—almost happiness. But it is vain to indulge in tedious details; she loved with all the strength and fervour of a first and deep attachment. And he?—It had “begun in folly;” he had broken no code of man’s moralities; for long intended no harm; and when dark selfish thoughts crept into his heart, he neither rebuked their presence, nor greatly encouraged their stay: he determined to let things take their course, and to trust to the “blind chance” of which fools talk, but which does not exist in the world. The effect to which these causes had led, was simply and naturally that Henrietta Sandford stood on a precipice, ready to leap into the gulf of ruin! Her position known by these tokens:—First, and chiefly, that she listened with a trusting, hopeful love to words of passion, from one who had no thought of making her his wife; and that she listened calmly, half approvingly, to the poor sophistries woven to mislead such hearts as hers; secondly, that she thought of her sometime companion, the Fanny before mentioned, with more sympathy than was maidenly; and thirdly, that when the whisperings of conscience, growing fainter and fainter, would yet at times be heard—she answered them with the self-deception of promised “comfort and ease for Clara, dear Clara.”

It was at such a height of peril as this that Madame Dobière’s business occasioned Henrietta to call on a certain youthful customer, to receive orders concerning wedding dresses. It was early in the day, and she was shown into a small drawing-room,—one of a magnificent suite,—and desired *to wait there a few minutes*. A half-closed folding door com-

municated with the next apartment; and without the power of retreating, and too timid to make her presence known, she could not avoid hearing many fragments of a low-toned conversation held in the adjoining room. They were the lovers who were there—the pair so soon to be wed. Breathing of deep heart love was many a sentence; yet what was it that pointed the difference between these lovers and her love? Not the difference of their station—that had nothing to do with it. What was it that, when the graceful girl—perhaps Henrietta's junior—entered the room, made her feel that she was in the presence of a purer being? And when afterwards she took from the young betrothed her quiet instructions about the dresses, and saw her remove a miniature she wore, as if proud of the right of wearing it, from her neck to try one on,—and when she heard her allude to her marriage with modest dignity,—what was it that made the tears start to poor Etty's eyes, and her heart whisper, "*My love is not like this?*" Oh! it was not a blind chance which prepared her mind, by the reception of such thoughts, for the events of the day.

On her return to Madame Dobière, she had no sooner repeated the instructions she had received, than she was informed a card had been left for her in her absence; it bore the name of her wealthy relative—the benefactor who had placed her in the establishment, and was indeed left there by his son. To such a visitor Madame had been extremely courteous, and had promised him a meeting with Henrietta that afternoon; and, moreover, that it should be at her humble lodging—an arrangement which he seemed much to prefer.

With a heart full of grateful recollections, yet trembling with a vague anxiety as to the purport of her relative's visit, Henrietta returned home at the appointed hour. She inquired of the people of the house if any one had asked for her, and was told, "only the doctor," who was up stairs with her sister.

The doctor, I need scarcely repeat, was Charles Weston; but this was a most unusual hour for a visit,—and Etty was so overpowered by her emotions—half surprise and half joy—that she paused for something like composure, ere she entered the room. The first object she beheld was Clara, half reclining, as she had left her, on a sofa which was by night converted into a bed, yet busily plying the needle. It was some black garment she was making; and truly her pallid countenance, her hollow eyes, and attenuated features—and yet more, the long thin fingers—conveyed such an impression of disease and death, that one might have fancied she was preparing a mourning garb for some loved one, who would sorrow at her death. By her side sat Charles Weston, but with a face so changed and haggard, that Henrietta could not refrain from uttering an ejaculation of horror and surprise.

“Do I look ill?” he said; “it is nothing—it will soon pass away.” But when he took her hand, Henrietta observed that he relinquished it quickly, throwing it from him as something almost to be rejected. Stunned by his coldness, she answered some questions he put to her clearly and distinctly—till, in doing so, she mentioned the expected visit of her cousin.

“I am your cousin!” said he, sinking his head upon his hand, and speaking quickly; “My name is not Weston—but I knew not of our relationship till to-day. Henrietta, I am speaking to you now as your relative—I am doing my father’s bidding. I scarcely knew that we had relations of your name; and had it not been that my father was anxious about you, he would never have mentioned to me that he had interested himself for you. But, as far as I can understand, he has had some communication with your Willow-dale friends; who, perhaps, from your letters, suspect your many trials, and *assuredly* are aware of poor Clara’s illness. At all events, he

commissions me to make every inquiry connected with your position; and desires me to use my own discretion in rendering you assistance." He paused a moment, ere he said, in a trembling voice, "You will trust to my discretion—my *cousin*?" He laid an emphasis on the last word, that seemed again to stun, but really strengthened Henrietta.

"Oh, yes," was all she murmured.


"My plan then is, that this hateful apprenticeship should cease;—money, you know, can break such bonds,—and there needs be no scruple; my father is a rich man, and your nearest relation;—I then propose that you should be established in business for yourself;—would you not like it to be in the town of L——, near your Willow-dale friends? With your London experience, you would certainly make a hit—and better, a fortune—in the country." He tried to speak in a tone of gaiety, but it would not do. Clara, who had dropped her work to listen to these, to her, most joyful tidings, yet broke the silence by exclaiming, with something like a sigh, "Shall we never see you again?"

The eyes of Henrietta and her cousin met—revealing the soul of each; and despite the presence of Clara, who was frightened at the scene which followed, he caught Henrietta for a moment in his arms, and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead—exclaiming, "We know the truth—the very truth—'tis best we part—you cannot be my wife. I have never thought of you as my wife."

Henrietta shrank—slipped from his arms. "Saved!—saved!" she murmured, in a choking voice: "Oh, God! I thank Thee!"

"Amen!" responded her cousin.

My simple story is almost done. Simple I may well call it; for such heroines as mine measure life by the inner world of the feelings, not by moving accidents or romantic adventures.


M. S.
Henrietta has been three years in business, is considered the favourite milliner of L——, and is noted for her extreme indulgence to the young people in her employ,—regulating their hours of work, and making her arrangements with every regard to their health and happiness. On one point, however, she is very particular;—she insists on knowing precisely with whom and how every Sunday and holiday are spent. They regard her with grateful affection, which, standing alone in the world as she does, I am sure she must prize. For, alas! the pure country air, and proper food, and freedom from life-wearing toil, came too late to save poor Clara. In the nearest churchyard to Willow-dale is she buried; and her memory is enshrined in many a warm heart besides that of poor Etty. Henrietta herself has never quite recovered her former healthful, youthful beauty, and she looks somewhat older than she is. Yet she has many suitors in her own station of life, and “they say” she has a preference. I hope it may be so; I am certain she will never give her hand without giving her heart: second love is sometimes a better love than first. She would be very likely to make an excellent wife.

THE END.

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